

Svyati

Looped in the Abbey's waterside
we try to warm and spread our voices
chorally in conversation
bending to its meditative space
with windows opening on green
and blue.

Waking had been punched
with the staccato pulse of war
on air waves, frayed chords
dragged through stirring sense,
mind and movement
jarred with dissonance.

Now we are here, are handed scores
to translate and lift together,
turn to song.

We open pages to long notes
and cadences above a Slavic script,
at first our stiff tongues catching
on Cyrillic consonants, uncurling
slowly to unfold a theme
of Crossing to another state,
another tune and time,
a nearer time, a present hurt,
a now.

And as we try to float the fuller chords,
'Imagine there is a butterfly
poised on your wrist', he said.
'Hold and swell the wings of breath
then let it go to build
and fall again, let go:
you'll find the rhythm there.'
And so we try to rise and fall and let it go
before the throat constricts,
before that catching of the breath
as we remember things
and build to 'Strong and pleading',
finally subside to 'Still, serene'.

At day's end in the chancel seats
before masked faces in the nave
we all released and held notes
while the cellist dipped and bowed
and rowed a passage
through the heart,
watched by high windows piercing stone,
the vigil lights.