

Katalin Ladik



Katalin Ladik at the project's second production workshop

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Katalin Ladik, born in 1942 in Novi Sad, Yugoslavia, now lives in Budapest, Novi Sad, and on the island of Hvar. The author, actress, and performer publishes poetry and prose, exhibits visual poetry, and performs her sound poetry. Her first volume of poetry, *Ballada az ezüstbicikliről* (Ballad of the Silver Bicycle), was published in 1969. Ladik has been present internationally at festivals since the 1970s and participated in documenta 14 in 2017. A retrospective was dedicated to her in Novi Sad in 2010. In 2016, the volume *A víz emlékezete* (The Memory of Water) was published by Kalligram in Budapest.

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Katalin Ladik

three eggs

Translated from Hungarian by Josef Schreiner

I do not consider myself a singer, musician, or composer. I am first and foremost a poet. I have acting experience in the theatre and in front of the radio microphone. I am also considered a visual artist in a certain sense beyond traditional poetry. My creative fields are: written poetry (linear poems), visual poetry, sound poetry, movement poetry, scriptwriting, and realization of conceptual works, creation of audio drama and radio plays, performance and creation of experimental music, happening, mail art.

I was born in a multicultural and multiethnic city in the former Yugoslavia and lived there until I was fifty, when I moved to Hungary in the early nineties due to the war between Serbs and Croats. Although my mother tongue is Hungarian and I write my poems and novels in Hungarian, Serbian is the second language I use, as I completed my schooling in Serbian. The other Slavic languages are not far from me. In primary school I studied German as a foreign language. Later I learned German and English on my own initiative. This diverse cultural influence has been a major inspiration for me in writing my poetry, but especially in my sound poetry.

In Serbia I had the opportunity to experience Serbian folk traditional rites "live." One summer, as a child, I saw a figure dressed in green leaves marching down the street singing and dancing. It was said that this figure – according to Serbian folklore it was presumably a girl – called for rain, because there was a great drought that summer. She or he was praying for rain, she or he was the Dodole. She sang and danced to a strange unison rhythm. As we lived close to the Serbian cemetery, we children used to accompany the mourning family and listened to the singing of wailers. When the grieving family was gone, they left delicious food and cakes at the gravesite, which we hungry children devoured with gusto. The lamenters' singing had a great effect on me. I later used their motifs several times in the performance of my sound poems.

As a poet, I realized early on what a cruel fate awaited my poems, as there was no one to translate them into Serbian or other foreign languages. Therefore, I was looking for a way to express my poetry and convey my poetic message in a meta-language and with archaic symbols. I thought that for this purpose, sound poetry and poetic performance would be the most appropriate. These were based on my own poems and texts, performed live or recorded by myself.

The musical sounds of Hungarian words and other spoken languages have a major role to play in my sound poems. I also pay attention to the semantic meaning of words. I am particularly interested in the meaning of the same word in different languages, e.g. the word "ja."

My very first book of poems, published in 1969, contains all the artistic genres which I later dealt with as separate media in their own right: the written/linear poems that people traditionally read and the visual poems that I later produced in larger numbers as collages, which are exhibited in galleries and museums. The book also featured performance scripts. An audio recording of my early sound poems was also included on a vinyl disk with the poetry book.

Even in my early poems, there were poems that I wrote for live performance because I could feel and hear how they should sound while I was writing them. What happened was that I did not have to notate the melody musically because even if I wanted to, I couldn't, because I had no musical training.

In fact, it was not a real melody, just a melody motif, a fragment of a melody. It was mostly the *Sprechgesang* (spoken singing) style that dominated, as in the melodies of lamentations, children's nursery rhymes, magic spells, sleep lullabies. I was delighted to discover that the young French poet Rimbaud had already discovered that voices have color and wrote his "Sonnet of Phonemes" (*Les Voyelles*). My later sound poems were already accompanied by certain notes so that I could perform them approximately, but much of it was improvised. I loved improvising because it always resulted in a new work, a new variation on an old theme. In this, too, I gave in to my vocation, to freedom, to change. I never hoped that my sound poems would be performed by someone else, because at the international sound poetry festivals, everyone performed their own work live or from recordings. This has not changed to this day.

Whatever my artistic genre, I always try to push the boundaries of poetry. Whatever the material I use in my work, I always convey a poetic message through it: sound poetry with my voice, image poetry with my visual works and collages, and multimedia poetic performance with my body. Creation, creativity, transformation and constant change are the very essence of my life. I draw most of my inspiration from myself and my environment, my multicultural and multi-ethnic environment, i.e. from my roots. The struggle of gender with itself and with the opposite sex is also often reflected in my work.

I also need to get into my own subconscious and into the hell of the creative process. Travelling in space-time commonly called descent to the underworld, immersion in a labyrinth, an inner journey. Serious, dramatic experiences in my life have often been reflected in my work. I try to alleviate these painful experiences with grotesque humor for myself and my readers or audience.

All my poems, performances and sound poems are based on the metaphor of sinking into the underworld. The connecting and recurring elements in these poems and performances can be colors, the melody of words, the naming of objects and objects, music, my own distorted face, an androgynous motif, or a recognizable movement sequence. Each poem is a story in itself. All my written/linear poems, visual poems, collages, and sound poems have titles, because titles

play a very important role in understanding my works. The titles are poetic lines of verse, keys to a broader interpretation of the work, but they are also works in their own right.

When I perform my sound poetry, I don't only use exhalation techniques in the formation of the sound, but also inhalation, the sound produced when inhaling. I realized that there is a direct connection between my voice and the way my muscles respond. My body reacts to the sound waves; it resonates like a string; the sound transforms my body movements. A physical sensation like sneezing or coughing moves my muscles. This everyday experience came spontaneously, which I later used in my vocal verses. I invented the poetic expression "sound-movement." The connection between visibility, between objects and sound and movement, is the essence of the unity of my written poetry and my extended poetry.

My art is based on change. I am very curious and open. In the seventies I admired the instruments in the sound studio of Radio Novi Sad, especially the integrated circuits (ICs), for the secret, mysterious information and knowledge they contained. From these circuit boards I made artworks and set them to music, which I sang in the seventies. In the same way, I was filled with awe and a little horror at the appearance of barcodes and QR codes in our lives. I have been using these barcodes and QR codes as musical scores and singing them for the last eight years. I was the first and only poet in Yugoslavia and Hungary in the seventies to recite my own poems in a non-traditional way. Studying the Serbian and Hungarian folk music traditions, lamentations and children's songs and listening to the original recordings, I tried to use certain motifs from them in my sound poetry.

Since my life was full of dramatic, painful events and memories, I have condensed them into my works, and in my work you can hear screaming, crying, and wailing, as in the Greek tragedies. I have tried to lighten up this dark, dramatic theme, sometimes with humor, to make it lighter and more bearable. This often took the form of grotesque humor.

When I came across the ingenious performances and working methods of the members of the *sprechbohrer* trio, I thought of writing down for them a score for a three-part sound poem in three languages, based on a charming and humorous wordplay. This is a big challenge for me, because I have never designed a sound poem to be performed by others. Notating this work, written in three languages and based on wordplay, seems to me to be a difficult task. This difficult task is also a pleasure because I learn while doing it. The feedback from the members of *sprechbohrer* ensemble on the work means a lot to me, I learn a lot from them and I am grateful to them for that.

I mentioned that the title of my works plays an important role. The egg has many symbolic meanings; just look at the lexicon of symbols. I think the egg is also a humorous metaphor. I like metaphor and humor in art.

My intention is to create a musically meaningful score by transforming the written text into a visual poem. I first wrote the text of the score in German, the first part: *I. Teil*. My aim was to combine the words *three eggs* with other words in a logical way: *ich, ja, aha, nur, habe gesagt, jaja, da, šta kažeš, good, jaj, I've lost my hair, wow, that's a problem*, etc., so that by including new words, i.e. new vowels and new consonants, colors, and rhythms, a new melody and rhythm is created musically.

In my works, there is often a dialogue between the poetic subject and an imaginary alter ego. It is an important dramaturgical method for me that the elements that make up the work are connected to each other, that they influence each other, that a dialogue develops between them.

three eggs is a sound poem with three different stories, in which the three performers retain the character of the role I have invented for them throughout, but react to the story at hand and the dialogue that develops in a way that is specific to them. Sigrid-S is basically curious, enthusiastic, sensitive and extroverted. Harald-H, like an educated teacher or judge, is understanding and just. Sometimes he cannot control his strong emotions. Georg-G He tries to be calm, sometimes sarcastic, ironic, wise. He has a sense of humor.

Finally, we witness the birth of a very challenging and enjoyable performance for all of us: the sprechbohrer create and sing the first alchemical singing egg!