

ZDRAVKA STEFANOVA, Bulgaria

Requiem in D Minor

The nuclear accident of Chernobyl could be hardly described with words. The grief of the time-witness is perceived through Mozart's last and unfinished piece Requiem Mass in D Minor K.626. Its richly diverse movements denote expressive spiritual depth – the dramatic sound of a tragedy.



Ms. Zdravka Stefanova (60) was born in Gabrovo, Bulgaria where she still lives today. She has a higher education in Music Pedagogy. Currently she is unemployed. Ms. Stefanova is single, her parents have passed away, but she has a sister who currently lives in Gabrovo as well. At the time of the Chernobyl accident she was 35, lived with her mother and was teaching Piano at the School of Arts. She was my first Piano teacher.

The first thing coming to her mind when she hears "Nuclear Power Plant" is "Chernobyl". Ms. Stefanova is familiar with the term "nuclear threat" from her Physics school books. Nevertheless, she was "For" the use of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes.

Back in 1986, she remembers that the society had a positive attitude towards the use of nuclear energy. Moreover, the brightest and most intelligent students applied to study Nuclear Physics since it was considered to be "a profession with future".

Until the Chernobyl accident, Ms. Stefanova hadn't heard of any accidents of that kind. She knew that the biggest Nuclear Power Plant (NPP) was in the USSR. In 1986, Bulgaria already had the Kozloduy NPP which is situated 200 km away from her place of living. The Bulgarian government probably had plans in case of emergencies in Kozloduy NPP but most of the citizens were not familiar with them. General rules in the event of a breakdown were taught only to students at high schools, universities and to workers.

Ms. Stefanova heard about the Chernobyl accident from close friends who had read about it in "Workers Affairs", a newspaper. She was meeting them for dinner and that was the main discussion topic. Everybody was very surprised and they wished it wasn't true. Ms. Stefanova and her friends were very worried and afraid since they found out several days later. The parents of her friends even noted why were they making a salad with fresh vegetables.

She also remembers her mother, very worried, looking for her old Physics school books to find more information what the consequences of that kind of an accident could be. As a person from another generation, her mother didn't have knowledge in this field and for some reason the media was insufficient.

Ms. Stefanova and her family were all concerned about the possible health consequences. At that time there were a lot of Bulgarians who went to study or work in the USSR, including Ukraine as a part of it then. Their families' and friends' thoughts were filled with concern for everyone who happened to be close to Chernobyl at the time of the accident. That was mainly due to the fact that the governments were trying to conceal the truth. As far for if anyone was able to handle what happened, Ms. Stefanova says that there probably was, but the majority of the people were not.

Our government's reaction was delayed information that certain foods should not be consumed. As for help and information, neither she nor her family received any.

She considers herself affected by the radioactive cloud that was spread from Chernobyl. Ms. Stefanova and her family tried to avoid fresh fruits and vegetables and were taking iodine pills as well. The Bulgarian government provided those only for children in kindergardens and students in primary and secondary schools, as well as universities. For anyone else it was optional whether to take this precaution but they were to purchase it. This fact made everyone realize that the consequences of the accident for the people and countries closer to Chernobyl were even greater. Health concern remained ever since then.

The Bulgarian government and citizens provided help for the people from the highly contaminated area. Every year after, children were accommodated for a summer in Bulgaria's nature as well. After the Chernobyl accident, the government provided training to everyone in every populated location. People were trained how to handle this kind of accidents, all facilities went through maintenance and the gamma-background was frequently monitored. But the joke of the students' favorite show "Ku-Ku" in 1991 proved how unprepared the people are for an accident of that scale.

Note: "Ku-Ku" is a show, broadcast on the Bulgarian National Television from January 1990 to September 1994. *"On 22 December the show was suddenly interrupted with the annoying message that "at Kozloduy NPP nothing to fear has happened". Those viewers who were accustomed to read between the lines were fully convinced that the Kozloduy NPP had exploded. Global agencies such as Reuters, AFP, and ZDF quickly spread the sensation. That joke was in no way innocent and was followed by a huge scandal."* The joke of "Ku-Ku" about Kozloduy NPP was voted 6th place on 11th February 2010 in the category "Absurdity and peculiarity" – the Bulgarian events of the twentieth century. The winner in this category with 29.05% votes was "The information

eclipse about Chernobyl". *"A classic totalitarian absurdity and crime against the society, the responsibility for which fell with the fallout on the 1st May Labor Day Parade. The tragedy happened on 26th April 1986 and the cloud reached Bulgaria on 1st May. Instead of taking all possible means to reduce the consequences of the accident, the government practiced guilty silence. The population throughout the country consumed poisonous spring vegetables. Bulgaria ranks fifth in Europe as for pollution and first for consumed radiation dose."*

Ms. Stefanova believes that everyone was affected by Chernobyl to some extent. A couple that she knew, who lived near Chernobyl at the time of the accident and expected their first child, have lost it. Her mother passed away from Leukaemia years later. Even the overall percentage of people who suffer from cancer has vastly increased.

In her opinion, Chernobyl today resembles a warning to be more cautious in nuclear energy production. She notes that the number of the renewable energy sources in Bulgaria has increased lately but unfortunately they are still not a substitute. Ms. Stefanova thinks that people and countries should really put more effort into finding an alternative to nuclear energy but until then she hopes that there are enough safety measures to prevent such accidents from happening again.