

SILENCE OF THE PIANO SINGS (SOPS)

Silence of the Piano Sings is a poetry book written by M. Syre. The book was published by Author House Publishers, London in March 2011.

Poems in SOPS deal with the ideas of liberty, justice, beauty, humanity, creativity, art, struggle, passion, emotions, etc. On the soil of words containing philosophical insight into the catholic variety of the subject matter, the poetic imagination in the book pelts down with the wine of symbolism as a colorful rain. The subject matter, in most of them, makes them modern, while the treatment to an extent touches pulse of the post-modern verse.

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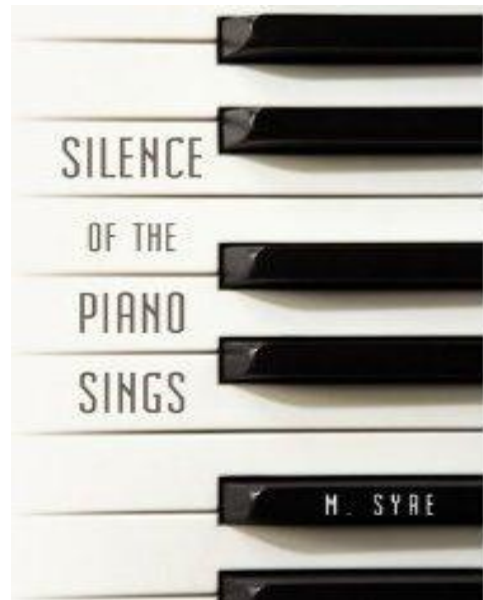
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AUTHOR

M. Syre, the author of the book, hails from Pakistan. He got birth in Hyderabad—the second largest city in the second largest province of Pakistan, Sindh—on 2nd August, 1975. “M. Syre” is the pen name the poet has been using for over several years in his essays, short stories, and now upcoming novels. His real name is Muzamil Hussain Halepoto..

Hatri is a little village in Hyderabad where Syre passed the early days of his childhood. Having received his basic education from Hatri, he moved with his family to the main city of Hyderabad, where he took his college and university education.

He had his bachelor’s in Sociology from Sachal Arts College (Hyderabad) and masters in English Literature from the University of Sindh in 1999. Meanwhile, as an English language teacher he taught in different schools and institutions like Sindh Academy, St. Bonaventure’s High School, Isra College, Pakistan American Cultural Centre and The City School (‘O’ Levels).

In 2002 he appeared in the country’s highest competitive civil bureaucracy examination known as CSS (Central Superior Services) and got allocated to the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting as Public Relations Officer (PRO). As a PRO he served in a number of ministries including the Federal Ministry of Health, Federal Ministry of Education, Federal Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Federal Ministry of Labour, Manpower and Overseas Pakistan.

In 2004 after the second attempt in the CSS examination, he got allocated to District Management Group (DMG). He served in Revenue, HRM, Finance and other administrative positions in cities like Mirpurkhas, Karachi and Badin.

In 2007 he got Chevening Scholarship from the British Council that brought him to the UK for doing masters in Management from the University of Surrey.

He has been a visiting lecturer on the subjects of literature and social philosophy. He has been delivering lectures from time to time in the Agha Khan University, SZABIST (Shaheed Zulfiqar Ali Bhatti Institute of Science and Technology), University of Surrey, and a number of places within the country and abroad. His primary interest is in Greek literature coupled with French and English literature, not excluding the Russian one. One can feel the influence of Greek, Roman and Indian mythology in his works. After literature, his major focus has remained over social philosophy that is what a reader can feel an influence of in his poems as well.

Apart from writing short stories, he has been writing several articles and essays in magazines like Halar, Nai Zindagi, Adab etc and newspapers like The Dawn, The News, The Nation etc. One of his essays/short stories titled *The Rain* was given an award by the University of Surrey in a competition held in the university in 2008. This essay is available on <http://immersivexperience.pbworks.com> under his real name Muzamil Hussain Halepoto.

He writes poetry in both Sindhi and English. His first book of Sindhi poetry titled *Sada Syre-a Seer-a Mein* was published in Hyderabad, Sindh in the year 2001, for which he was given an award by Sindh Graduates Association (SiGA) in the same year. *Silence of the Piano Sings* is his second book, and first in English. His upcoming novels would be an addition to his other literary pursuits. His personal website is www.msyre.com.

COMPOSITION HISTORY

Writing

Before appearing in March 2011, *Silence of the Piano Sings* took around six years to complete. M. Syre composed the poems at various places and noted down their dates and places for the record. It was the travels and his interest in those places, people, events and times that he has penned down his poems with. Most of them include his emotional attachment and involvement into matters/people. Most of the poems come from the year 2008 when he visited Europe and the UK, especially France, Italy, Greece, Holland/Netherlands. However, majority of the contribution in this regard has been from England, like Bath, London, Bristol, Cardiff, Southampton, Stratford-upon-Avon, Portsmouth, Isle of Wight, Woking, Guildford, Surrey, etc. Paris, Athens, Florence, Pisa, Rome, Vatican City, Amsterdam, Venice etc too have a significant influence on the poet. Aside from it, China's cities like Xian, Beijing, Badaling (The Great Wall of China) and Tianjin have had a considerable impact on the poet's mind. One of the poems was composed in Kuwait as well. Thereafter one can notice a big list of Pakistani cities/towns etc: Karachi, Chitral, Islamabad, Lahore, Kashmir, Nangarparkar, Keti Bunder, Hyderabad, Jamshoro, Bhit Shah, Mirpurkhas, Kailash, etc.

M. Syre started composing these poems in different times especially when he was undergoing training at DMG Specialized Training Programme at Mall Road Campus Lahore, the capital of the Punjab province. There he had an opportunity to officially visit places like the northern areas, Chitral, Kailash, most of the NWFP (now KPK—Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province), parts of the province of the Punjab, Balochistan and most of the areas of Sindh province.

Besides, his posting in different cities like Islamabad, Mirpurkhas and Karachi became a core influence on his poems through his experience out of those cities and visits to the surrounding places officially or unofficially. His trips to the United Kingdom as a Chevenor (a British Council Chevenor Scholar) and excursion trips to the Europe mainland, Kuwait and China, and above all the imagination, energy and passion of his poetic soul that is replete with love for the land and people he belongs to, love for the mankind he lives amidst, love for the life and its philosophy, all contribute to the composition of *Silence of the Piano Sings*.

Editing

Though Syre was self-reliant as a critic, Zahid Ali Jatoy (educationist, writer and Professional Development teacher (PDT) in Agha Khan University-Institute for Educational Development (AKU-IED) assisted him as an editor in *Silence of the Piano Sings*. It was at latter's suggestions that Syre with his critical approach analyzed and finally chose to remove a number of poems from the book. Aside from poems, some titles got changed as a result of input and analyses by both Jatoy and Syre. For instance the title of a poem "My Mind's Both Fag and Fire" was changed into "My Mind is Fag an' Fire". Similarly, the following poem was originally attributed to Baudelaire with a title *To Baudelaire*, but thereafter the same was titled in a more abstract way not leading the reader to ascribe the meaning of it to Baudelaire only:

What You Sculpt, I Do Not

What you sculpt, I do not,
What I carve, you may not,
But hangs still in the mind
Some careless, clueless rhyme!
We make the same music!

Jatoy and Syre kept working on four drafts of the book for several months. This grueling journey of editing coupled with analyses led them to bring a number of changes to the original draft. The supposed editing though peripheral in nature signified a conspicuous change in some of the poems, especially their titles and a few phrases. For instance, in the following poem, the first line was written as "with one leg chopped off above the knee". It was thereafter discussed as to why "above the knee" is significant in the poem; the meaning could be conveyed without the phrase. And as such the poem finally adopted the following shape:

With One Leg Chopped Off

with one leg chopped off,
a half-naked, malnourished, starving child
crawls along
a roasting hot metal road
utterly oblivious to the
chill and exotic perfume
dancing inside
the luxurious
Aston Martin
screeching across the road.

In the similar vein, the following poem, which was a bit long compared to its final shape, came out only to three words instead of around fifty words:

Hemlock

Socrates
killed
hemlock!

Perhaps, the above poem titled “Hemlock” is the smallest of poems in the world!

However, the core editing of the book was done by Syre, who revisited his four drafts passionately before getting the book published.

PUBLISHING HISTORY

Exactly after the editing was done, the publishing process began. Through the online search, Syre got hold of an online publisher, Author House Publishers from the USA. Accordingly, after four months of wait, the book was published in paperback from Author House Publishers in March, 2011. Conclusively, the inauguration ceremony of the book was launched at Pembroke College, Oxford University in May 2011, wherein M. Syre was invited to deliver a lecture on *Silence of the Piano Sings*.

TITLE

M. Syre originally considered titling the book *The Bell Chimes*. The title was selected from a poem with the same title. The poet considered the title to be prophetic as the phrase “the Bell Chimes” suggested one or the other way a clarion call to the world/ reader. So, it was changed into *Silence of the Piano Sings*—more of an aesthetic and artistic title than a revolutionary one.

The title suggests an apparent paradox in the wording. Close to being an oxymoron, the word ‘silence’ is shown ‘to sing’ in the keys of the piano.

Once at Paul and Fran’s (Paul and Fran are the English couple who live at Guildford) Syre sat to play on the piano. A French friend of the poet, Carine Bazine, tried to touch the keys of the piano having seen him idly sitting at the piano for several minutes. Before she could touch the piano keys, he said to her, “Let the piano be as silent as it is now, because right now I can feel several tunes vibrating through its keys. Its silence is practically at work. If you touch the keys, tunes that I can feel now will fly away. I will be at a losing end.” Thus, the following poem and the title of the book:

Touch not Piano Keys, Madame

Touch not piano keys, Madame,
Silence of the piano sings!
Let the tunes in piano sing,
Let the piano sing in tunes!
Let the tunes in piano dance,
Let the piano dance in tunes!

I see the world singing and
Dancing through centuries in

These black, white keys of piano!
Touch not piano keys, Madame!

I see nubile, hot Helen
Uncurling her wavy curls
On the beach of Greek history;
With uncurling of her curls,
History gets curled up fully;
Many Homers, many bards
Go on telling Helen's tale
Go on hailing Helen's hell!
I see pretty Cleopatra
In Anthony's warmer lap
Singing tunes of Roman praise,
Singing what Anthony has,
Singing what Caesar has not!
I see Virgil strolling through
Affluent meadows of Rome
Singing songs of his Aeneid!
I see Sappho of Lesbos
Loosing webs of mind and soul,
Printing on the lips of friends
Verses which the world recites!
I see Samson—hairy man—
Laughing in the piano keys
At the crooked Delilah!
I see keys dancing on tunes
Hummed by Voltaire in free France:
In chorus whole Europe sings
Freedom, justice, equity!
I see Simone de Bouva
Embracing Sartre in love
While waltzing across the globe!
I see in *Beautiful Mind*
Nash dancing on mental tunes
Stronger than what Beethoven
Could hear in his symphonies!

I see myself in all these
Ladies, gentlemen alike,
Feel I am performing some
Stately, lively, mod salsa!
And I feel, Madame, I sing
On the wings of Time that moves.
I am immortal, Madame,
For these keys, these black, white keys
Sing those everlasting notes
That echo across cosmos,
Never to be dead or gone!

Oh, Madame, touch not the keys!
Let the tunes in piano sing,
Let the piano sing in tunes!

Let the tunes in piano dance,
Let the piano dance in tunes!
Touch not piano keys, Madame,
Silence of the piano sings!

STRUCTURE AND IDEA(S)

Poems

The book comprises sixty short poems. At the end of each of these poems dates are given with the names of places where they were composed. Poems have different metres and arrangement; most of them being prose poems. The subject matter of the book is quite versatile and the treatment fairly eclectic.

The sequence and placing of poems is neither intentional nor haphazard. It is just the flow of the poet's mind that is at work behind placing of the poems where they are. The first poem *On Cloud of Drifting Time* suggests an idea of strength, striking with the idea of truth as Socrates did; while the second poem *I Have Poured My Wine* tilts to give a modernistic idea of the poet's ideology and egoistic flavour obliquely suggesting that his philosophy, ideology or whatever he believes in has or will have a profound impact on the world from various angles. Likewise, poems do not have a continuous connection in terms of idea or subject, but they have been placed to touch various ideas without any sequential manner.

Being modernistic in its themes the poems contain ideas of liberty, justice, freedom, etc. However, these modern ideas are not given the modern treatment in the book. There are a few of poems with Romantic approach applied on them, for instance *I Saw the Silvery/Voice of Birds and Insects*; nonetheless, the treatment of poems has more of post-modernistic elements in them. The book is an admixture of modernism, post-modernism and romanticism. Though the poems do not necessarily give an impression of postmodernism pervading through them, a contemporary pulse beats within most of them.

Symbolism is one of the key elements in the poems. Wine, Statue of Liberty, Goddess of Justice, Silence of the Piano, Hemlock, Socrates, Venom, Smoking, Cough, Tower of Pisa, Ash, The Bell Chimes, Corpse, Eyes, Music, Leaning, The Ice Age, A Venetian Market, Trumpet, Freckles, Ink, Fag, Fire, etc have been used in the book as universal and special symbols for the meaning the poet wishes to convey. In here, Syre sounds like W. B. Yeats having focused on special symbols compared to more general and universally known ones.

Preface

The preface *From the Thames to Land's End* (written in 2008) demands some special attention for its uniqueness. Syre says at the end of the preface, "This 'preface' is an experiment, as I have not availed myself of the prevailing styles of prefaces coming from *Lyrical Ballads* and even before it. I have, however, tried to make use of fiction to meet my purpose fine."

Indeed, prefaces like *Lyrical Ballads* were change agents in their peculiar contexts. This Preface is written in a semi-fictional style. The poet (M. Syre) sits at the bank of the Thames River and from there starts meeting several personalities like Albert Camus, Shakespeare, Baudelaire, Cicero, Dylan Thomas, Jane Austen and visits several places like Land's End, Paris, Wall of China, Athens, Bath, Stratford-upon-Avon, Pisa and many more to indirectly give a hint

of what his poems contained, very carefully avoiding to exactly put what he specifically wanted to say in the poems. Such an overlapping of Time and Space, coupled with flavour of fiction and philosophical depiction of scenes and the dialogues contained therein, this preface may be an addition to the existing styles of prefaces.

From the first paragraph of the Preface, which begins with the description of the Thames River and its surroundings, the poet sees Albert Camus, the great French Existentialist and novelist, pass, who is subsequently invited by the author to sit with him in an open air restaurant. During their sitting, the author notices Camus feel alien to himself. In order to relax him, the author takes him to Paris and travels along with him at a number of prominent places in the capital of France. The places they visit have one or the other way relevance to Camus in connection with a poem written by Syre on him in *Silence of the Piano Sings*. Camus leaves him in Paris. Then he is joined by Baudelaire, who takes him to Louvre museum. Then a continuous story begins wherein a number of characters meet the author, for instance, Shakespeare, Jane Austen, Dionysus, Dylan Thomas, Wordsworth, Michelangelo, Cicero, Brutus, Caesar, Shelley, Dante, Mona Lisa, and many more. Not only the personalities, but the places he visits like Athens, Stratford-upon-Avon, Bath, Badaling (Wall of China), Athens, Pisa, Osborne House (Isle of Wight) etc turn out to be a good mixture of the living and the non-living in putting them in his semi-fictional preface. Of course, the preface is of its own kind.

COMMENTS

The comments have been contributed in the book by Anna Mendelssohn (a British poetess), Jason Robinson (an American poet), Aleja Benet (an American poetess), Amjad Islam Amjad (a Pakistani poet), Zahid Ali Jatoui (a Pakistani educationist and writer) and Anthony Watkins (an American poet). They say:

It is a splendid, magnificent and well written piece of art Syre has given us. Aleja Bennett A colourfully spun web, almost invisible, has been dropped onto the landscape of verse in Silence of the Piano Sings. Let's welcome Syre's bold gesture of involvement with the post-modern verse! Anna Mendelssohn

Syre's poems are compact and thought provoking. He has the capacity to think and feel with craft to structure the same in verse. His I Keep on Taking Puffs at My Life particularly reminds me a line of T.S. Eliot, "I have measured out my life with coffee spoons." I find Syre's poetry touching and delightful at the same time. Amjad Islam Amjad

In Silence of the Piano Sings, Syre reads us biography of human. Zahid Ali Jatoui What an elegant and modern way Syre has to bring the classics all into one place through his poetry! Anthony Watkins

I think Syre exceeds many in his talent. Jason Robinson

SOURCES

Sources that M. Syre quotes from or alludes to in his poems as well as the preface come from variety of writers/philosophers/artists/politicians/poets, for instance, Dante, Mozart, Wagner, Beethoven, Albert Camus, Jean Paul Sartre, Robert Frost, M. K. Gandhi, Charles Baudelaire, Shakespeare, Bach, Walt Whitman, Jane Austen, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, Brutus, Caesar, Michelangelo, Queen Victoria, de Vinci, Shelley, Milton, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Shah Abdul Latif Bhitai, William Wordsworth, Dylan Thomas, S. T. Coleridge, Descartes, Virginia

Woolf, Thackeray, Kierkegaard, Sigmund Freud, Machiavelli, Bacon, Tolstoy, Rodin, Van Gogh, Raphael, Carlyle, Byron, Picasso, Virgil, Euripides, Will Durant, Catullus, Kalidasa, Sappho, Samuel Becket, Homer, Keats, Voltaire, Simon de Bouva, Marlowe.