

Why do we sing? Mario Benedetti

Mario Benedetti, the literary voice of the progressive left in Latin America, died yesterday in Montevideo, Uruguay - his home country. I think it's impossible to overestimate the importance of Benedetti and his work to the social justice movements in our continent - his words have inspired and comforted multiple generations. Here is one of his most performed poems/ songs, *Por qué cantamos?* - Why do we sing?



If each hour comes with its own death
if time is a cave of thieves
and the airs are no longer such good airs,
life is nothing but a mobile target
and you will ask why do we sing...

If those who are ours are left without an embrace
our motherland is almost dead of sadness
and the heart of man is blown to pieces
before shame exploded.
You will ask why do we sing...

We sing because the river sounds
and when the river sounds, sounds the river.
We sing because the cruel has no name
but his name has one.
We sing because of the child and because of everything
and because of some future and because of the people.
We sing because the survivors
and our dead want us to sing.
If we were far as a horizon,
if trees and sky were left here,
if every night was an absence
and every waking up a missed encounter
You will ask why do we sing...

We sing because it rains on the furrow
and we are militants of Life
and because we cannot and do not want to
let songs become ashes.
We sing because a cry is not enough
and neither are tears or anger.
We sing because we believe in people
and because we will overcome defeat.
We sing because the Sun recognizes us
and because the fields smell like spring
and because in this stem, in that fruit
every question has its answer...

Si cada hora vino con su muerte,
si el tiempo era una cueva de ladrones,
los aires ya no son tan buenos aires,
la vida nada más que un blanco móvil
y usted preguntará por qué cantamos...

Si los nuestros quedaron sin abrazo,
la patria casi muerta de tristeza,
y el corazón del hombre se hizo añicos
antes de que estallara la vergüenza
Usted preguntará por qué cantamos...

Cantamos porque el río está sonando,
y cuando el río suena suena el río.
Cantamos porque el cruel no tiene nombre
y en cambio tiene nombre su destino.
Cantamos porque el niño y porque todo
y porque algún futuro y porque el pueblo.
Cantamos porque los sobrevivientes

y nuestros muertos quieren que cantemos.
Si fuimos lejos como un horizonte,
si aquí quedaron árboles y cielo,
si cada noche siempre era una ausencia
y cada despertar un desencuentro
Usted preguntará por qué cantamos...

Cantamos porque llueve sobre el surco
y somos militantes de la Vida
y porque no podemos, ni queremos
dejar que la canción se haga cenizas.
Cantamos porque el grito no es bastante
y no es bastante el llanto, ni la bronca.
Cantamos porque creemos en la gente
y porque venceremos la derrota.
Cantamos porque el Sol nos reconoce
y porque el campo huele a primavera
y porque en este tallo, en aquel fruto
cada pregunta tiene su respuesta...

Canciones del desexilio, 1983
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