

PROGRAM NOTE

Saint Elizabeth Bells takes its inspiration from bell sounds of the Saint Elizabeth Cathedral in central Budapest. The cathedral is named after Saint Elizabeth of Hungary, a Catholic saint who served the sick. The piece was written in memory of my father, Sándor Agócs (1932-2011). He spent his final days over Easter in Saint Elizabeth Hospital, which stands next to the cathedral. His room faced the cathedral, and through the open windows he would have heard, in semi-consciousness, the tolling bells drifting and resonating. Every phrase of the work's trajectory comes out of the natural intervals of the bell sounds as I mis-remember (and imagine) them, with the purest version – and the part that I composed first – heard near the end. The piece is not mournful, but has a light, evanescent, delicate quality. Inhabiting a meditative space populated with memories just out of reach, the work is a dialogue of colours in which time is suspended. *Saint Elizabeth Bells* was commissioned by the cellist André Emelianoff, who encouraged me to explore my Hungarian roots by writing a piece that included the cimbalom, the concert hammered dulcimer, in its scoring. Those roots originate with my father, who came from a family of watermelon farmers – the first of his family to be educated – and who fled the county as a political refugee after the 1956 uprising. The work was premiered by Paul Katz and Nicholas Tolle on the New England Conservatory's First Monday series in 2013, and is about ten minutes in duration.

–Kati Agócs