

In November of 2005 I received an e-mail from Jila Nikpay, who wanted music for her book, *Heroines: Transformation in the Face of Breast Cancer*, a collection of her photographs of breast cancer survivors. The photographs are accompanied by poetic descriptions of each woman, written by Jila herself. I thought, "Nice project, but I'm too busy." Rather reluctantly, I agreed to meet with her, and went armed with a list of other women composers who would be perfect for the job. But when I saw the remarkably expressive photographs and read the poetry, I began to hear music, and to imagine how the poems might be set... The result is *Music for Heroines*, a cycle of five songs on Jila's poems. It was premiered April 8, 2006, at the Open Book in Minneapolis, MN, by Janet Gottschall-Fried, soprano, and Judy Kogan, harp.

duration: c. 12:00

My culture has forgotten:

The mind and the body
The body and the spirit
And the spirit and the mind
Are One.

To remember,
I walk through
The maze of inner self
In search of healing.

I've always been
A seeker.

Grieved as I was
Lying on the hospital bed
Severed
Like
Saint Agatha
I was filled with light

I sense the Light
It fills me
From time to time

I was the invisible child.
Knotted
Wanting
To know the heart.

Through illness
I was mothered
By many.
Felling no separation,
I entered into the circle of love
Free and strong.

Suddenly I was stripped
Breastless
Bald
Sick

I became awake--
To perceive
Suffering behind faces.
To see
Even the eclipsed Moon
Caught in the shadow play of sky
Is blessed with the the Sun's beauty
Forever.

I'm not afraid of death
But to sort through my life
Before I am gone
I tirelessly bead
Making jewels
To give away
And delight.

I am not afraid of death
I know I am strong
I'll walk through heaven's gates
With laughter.

Jila Nikpay

from *Heroines: Transformation in the Face of Breast Cancer*