

KRŪMMI (The Raven)

This traditional Icelandic greeting song has a text over two hundred stanzas long. When a traveler visited one of the remote homesteads, before he was invited into the house, he would stand at the doorstep and trade verses with the would-be host. The dialogue would include the perils of the journey, news of other farmsteads, and brave tales and boasts about all manner of things seen, heard or imagined. When the host was satisfied with the traveler's story-telling, he invited him into the house by singing a verse that likened the traveler to the raven who must spend his winter's night huddled against a cold mountain cliff.

The tune's initial (and traditional) scale uses a flatted second and a perfect fifth, found only in the Phrygian mode. Our arrangement retains the traditional sound by beginning the song in a Hyperaeolian scale (an Aeolian-scale tuning whose melody begins and ends a fifth above the tonic). After establishing the melody we move the song's key-center down to include the perfect second of the Aeolian scale. This improvisational departure is the result of the recorded version's interweaving with the mridangam of Guruvayru Dorai. Imparting a technique of the raga, we build our individual themes toward the "sam" (coming together). A final refrain is played during which the verse is sung.

LYRICS

Krummi swaff e kletta giow –
Kaldri, vetrar, nottur ow.
Verthur margth ath maynee,
Verthur margth ath maynee.

The raven sleeps on the
side of the cliff
on a cold winter's night.
There are many things
that bring grief to the soul.

