



# 7 Songs of the Refugee

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Grenland Friteater

# The story

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Tor Arne Ursin

The drama takes us to China twelve hundred years ago to the downfall of the mighty Tang dynasty. We meet the hermit Tu, an old man who is “exiled forever”. He fell from a position of high office at the Emperor’s court: “It was a misunderstanding: I expressed myself too clearly”. Now he is a refugee, living on the few herbs he can find under the snow. In a flashback he remembers his years as a soldier at the front, how he had to leave his family, and the bloody battles he fought.

*The whole world is in confusion of war  
The bale fires flare over the whole earth  
Corpses are piling up on the grass, and  
the smell is terrible  
Blood runs like water, reddening the  
rivers and the plain  
There is no safe place on earth  
Why do I go? Why do I stay?*

*I must make up my mind to go on,  
Leave my home once and forever*

\*

7 Songs of the Refugee is the third solo production based on Georg Johannesen’s texts featuring Geddy Aniksdal. The previous productions Blue is the Smoke of War (1997 - 2005) and No Doctor for the Dead (with Anette Røde Hagnell, (2004 -) have been performed on several continents. 7 Songs of the Refugee was first produced in winter/spring 2015, and had its premiere during the Porsgrunn International Theatre Festival in 2015.

## Tu Fu (A.D. 713 – 770)

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“He is the greatest of Chinese poets without exception ... There is an immense calm and an immense irony in his work, and a terrible sympathy. He has little, or no, self-pity ... He looks at the earth calmly and dispassionately, having shared all evils, having shared all disasters, a man who is not unlike other men except in the range of his sensibility.”

*Robert Payne, 1947*

Tu Fu came from a family of scholars and he could and should have held one of the highest offices at the Emperor's court, but he failed the imperial examinations. He lived through desperate times, when the Chinese empire was invaded by Mongol tribes. There had been frontier wars from the beginning of time, but now the wars were infinitely more real, and the conscription regulations imposed by the Emperor infinitely

more terrible. Old men, and even women, were hauled off to the wars.

Tu Fu was impoverished, his children starved to death, and the war drove him from province to province. In the end he was found in a ruined temple after a storm, half dead from hunger and exhaustion. His survival was celebrated with food and wine but that killed him.

Tu Fu's poems are not afterthoughts, portraits of war when the wars were over. They were written by a man who felt the full force of the suffering around him. His “I” is always a “we”.

# Call me Tu

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Geddy Aniksdal

In the late summer of 2014 I started to carve out possibilities for making a new solo work. Almost without hesitation I returned to Tu Fu. Tu Fu's poems have been a source and text material in several of my earlier performances. There are some actions connected to this work, that are permanently impregnated into my body. Some words are lodged in my mind. They stay, they have moved in for good.

This extract of his poem lives with me:

## *Farewell to my Old Wife:*

*The country is still at war; no safety  
Old as I am, I cannot retire  
My son and grandson died at the front  
What good is it to me to live on earth?  
I set aside my stick and go out doors  
With aching heart and empty mind  
Fortunately my teeth are all sound  
But I am afraid my bones will give up*

*Never mind, I am wearing my uniform  
I bow to the officer, I bid him farewell  
My old wife lies by the roadside weeping  
Her summer dress made ragged by the  
winter wind  
I don't know if I will see her again  
And yet I am afraid that she will catch cold  
I leave with no hope of returning  
Yet she tells me:  
"Keep well, my love,  
keep well"*

Like a living tattoo. These words and what they evoke were calling to me again. An ache, a kind of unrest, a special need of some sort were calling from afar. A need perhaps to address dark matters. The sadness of our wars in our times. The correlation to parts of someone's every day life. A seemingly never ending tragedy. A futile attempt at a quiet shout. Towards the cold impotence.

Being almost twice as old as Georg when he started with his translation of Tu Fu, I ask myself: Where are you going to? Or escaping from?

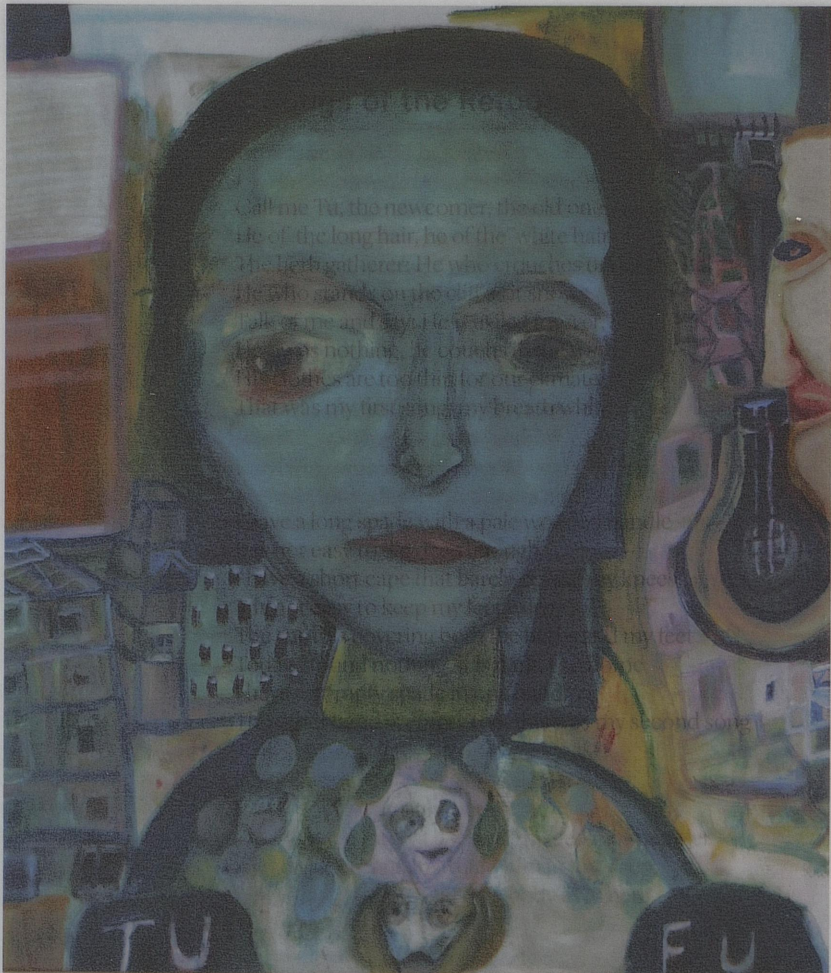
Am I going to escape into a world of loaded silences, a strange after. The battle. The bomb. A quiet fright, at times with a strange beauty. These words, these lived experiences, from Tu Fu's China, a place so far away. So here, today, will do: these words will do now as they have done for more than 1200 years.

7 Songs of the Refugee are my learning pieces. I have tried to apply the same three qualities that Tu Fu told us that the army leader saw in his generals; patience, experience and understanding. The performance is a piece to be seen with your ears and heard with your eyes. There might be a sensation of relief afterwards. To know how lucky we are. To be in a theatre space. To

only have to witness this spectacle, not live it. To trust that deep inside our hearts we have our sense of reason.

Call me you. Call me Tu.





Geddy as  
"Tu Fu"  
By Georg  
Johannesen



Johannesen  
By Georg  
"Tu Fu"  
Geddy as



## § 7 Songs of the Refugee

Which of my brothers is alive today?

Who is hungry? Who has eaten?

All we brothers were born on the same floor

Call me Tu, the newcomer, the old one snow but still

He of the long hair, he of the white hair

The herb gatherer: He who crouches under the hill

He who stands on the cliff as it snows

Talk of me and say: He is exiled forever,  
He owns nothing, he coughs in the wind

His clothes are too thin for our climate

That was my first song: my breath white

I have not seen her for eight years

She lives by a wild river without boat or bridge

The road there is barred by arrows and enemy flags

I have a long spade with a pale wooden handle

It is not easy to dig deep enough

I have a short cape that barely covers my knees

It is not easy to keep my feet warm

The snow is covering both the herbs and my feet

Today I found nothing, it is dark, I go home

I have an empty spade in one hand

The other hand is empty too, this was my second song

Yellow bushes stand around the grey village

A white fox jumps, a yellow fox stands still

Here I live; but why only here?

I dreamt last night that a friend grasped my shoulder

I did not notice, but answered him in my sleep:

Here is my fifth song: Only my body lives here

## 7 Songs of the Refugee

1  
That was my first song: my breath white  
His clothes are too thin for our climate  
He owns nothing, he coughs in the wind  
Talk of me and say: He is exiled forever,  
He who stands on the cliff as it snows  
The herb gatherer: He who crouches under the hill  
He of the long hair, he of the white hair  
Call me Tu, the newcomer, the old one

2  
The other hand is empty, too, this was my second song  
I have an empty spade in one hand  
Today I found nothing, it is dark, I go home  
The snow is covering both the herbs and my feet  
It is not easy to keep my feet warm  
I have a short cape that barely covers my knees  
It is not easy to dig deep enough  
I have a long spade with a pale wooden handle

Johannsen  
By Georg  
"Tu Tu"  
gedy as

3

Which of my brothers is alive today?  
Who is hungry? Who has eaten?  
All we brothers were born on the same floor  
China has many roads covered by dust or snow  
The cranes have flown across the sky  
I should have followed them both south and north  
For this is my third song, it asks this:  
Which of my brothers will bury me here?

4

My youngest sister is already a widow  
I have not seen her for eight years  
She lives by a wild river without boat or bridge  
The road there is barred by arrows and enemy flags  
From whence one cannot go one cannot come either  
Where there is no road, there is no boat  
She lives in a land where the monkeys even complain during the day  
My fourth song speaks of this, I am afraid

5

There is also a closed road and a wild river here  
The snow becomes a flood, forest ground becomes bog  
Yellow bushes stand around the grey village  
A white fox jumps, a yellow fox stands still  
Here I live; but why only here?  
I dreamt last night that a friend grasped my shoulder  
I did not notice, but answered him in my sleep:  
Here is my fifth song: Only my body lives here

Here is my fifth song: Only my body lives here

I did not notice, but answered him in my sleep:

I dreamt last night that a friend grasped my shoulder

Here I live; but why only here?

A white fox jumps, a yellow fox stands still

Yellow willow bushes stand around the grey village

The snow becomes a flood, forest ground becomes bog

There is also a closed road and a wild river here

Today I found a thing it is dark, I go home

The snow is falling both the heels and the feet

My fourth song speaks of this, I am afraid

She lives in a land where the monkeys even complain during the day

Where there is no road, there is no boat

From whence one cannot go one cannot come either

The road there is barred by arrows and enemy flags

She lives by a wild river without boat or bridge

I have not seen her for eight years

My youngest sister is already a widow

The checker we took him for our climate

Leaves no mark on enough in the wind

Which of my brothers will buy me here?

For this is my third song, it asks this:

I should have followed them both south and north

The cranes have flown across the sky

China has many roads covered by dust or snow

All we brothers were born on the same floor

Which of my brothers is alive today?

Which of my brothers is alive today?

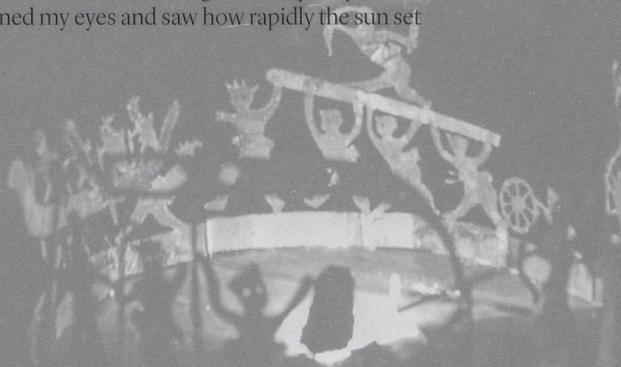
3 Songs of the Refugee

6

Down south they say a dragon lives in the sea  
Up north naked trees point towards the sky  
Their crowns empty branches  
The leaves fell into the water, but the dragon did not stir  
From the east serpents are slithering here: They dare  
I have a sharp sword that I cannot lift  
This is my sixth song: now it is springtime  
The wind became warm again this year too

7

Here I have become old, without becoming anything else  
Three years of famine consumed thirty years  
I have lived from picking berries in the woods  
In the capital the officials are still young  
It is natural that young people will rise in the world  
My wisest friends live in the mountains  
Yes, this is the seventh song, it ends quietly:  
I opened my eyes and saw how rapidly the sun set



Up north marked trees point towards the sky

Their crowns empty branches the same hue

The leaves fell into the water, but the dragon did not stir

From the east seagulls are sithering here: They dare

I have a sharp sword that I cannot lift and north

This is my sixth song: now it is springtime

The wind became warm again this year too

Here I have become old, without becoming anything else

Three years of famine consumed thirty years

I have lived from picking berries in the woods

In the capital the officials are still young: *young tags*

It is natural that young people will rise in the world here

My wisest friends live in the mountains

Yes, this is the seventh song, it ends dutifully: complain during the day

I opened my eyes and saw how rapidly the sun set

There is also a closed road and a wild river here

The snow becomes a flood, forest ground becomes bog

Yellow bushes stand around the grey village

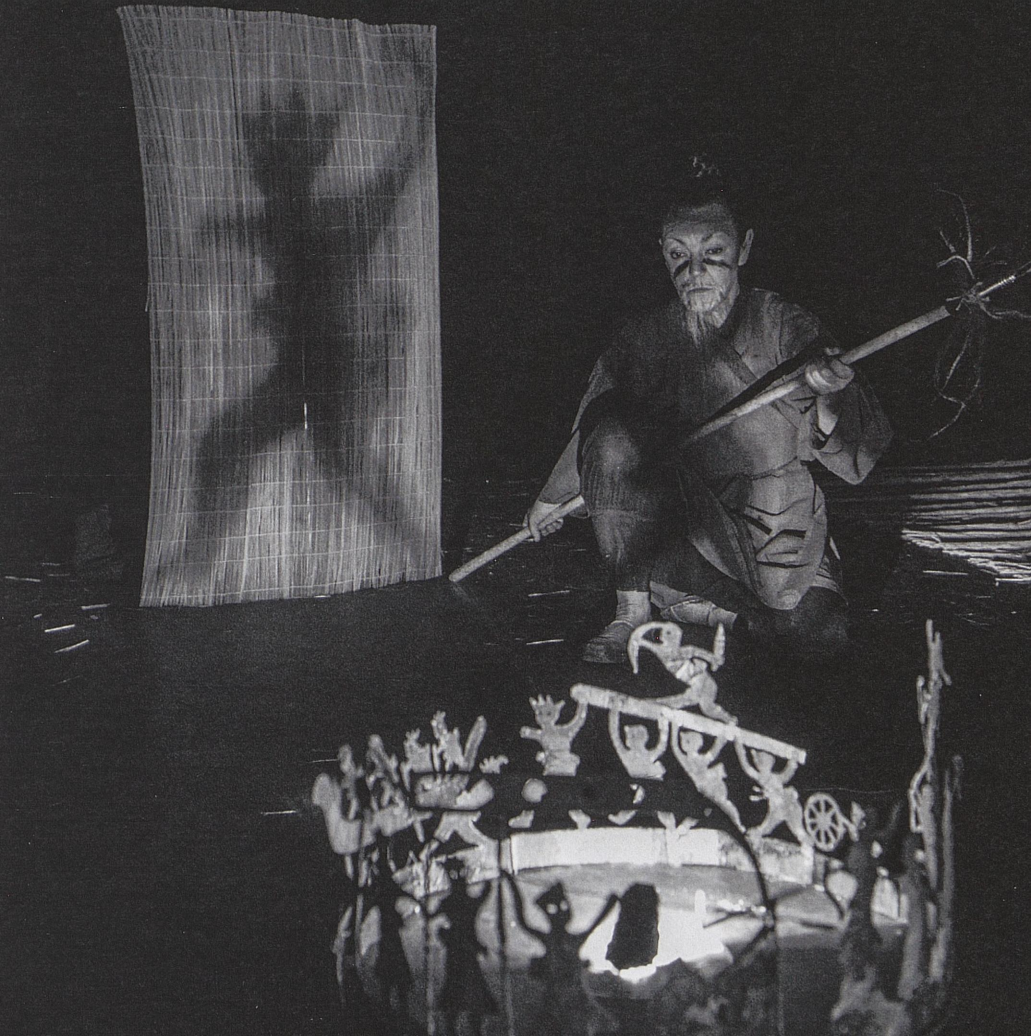
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I did not notice, but answered him in my sleep:

Here is my fifth song: Only my body lives here



# About the translations

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Tor Arne Ursin

All of the English texts in this performance are based on Georg Johannesen's Norwegian translations which were published in 1968. At that time, at the age of 37, Johannesen was already well-established as a poet, a rebel and a sharp critic of literature and politics. But, as he told us years later, he wanted to put the mask of an older man, and Tu Fu was perfect for this. Without this book, simply titled "Tu Fu", it is unlikely that we would have taken such a deep interest in the Chinese master poet of more than 1200 years ago. But Johannesen managed to draw Tu Fu near to us. In the afterword to the 1968 edition, he explains some of the thinking behind his interest in Tu Fu:

## *An excuse*

*Some of the finest Western translators of Chinese poetry (i.e. Arthur Waley*

*and Ezra Pound) have passed Tu Fu (712-770) respectfully by. One can understand them. Art historians should probably avoid reconstructing the Oseberg Viking ship from a radar image. A Norwegian who knows no Chinese should maybe also refrain from translating Tu Fu into his own language... But on the other hand, NATO's Norwegian newspapers are published every day. In a reasonable world I think the opposite should have been true: Tu Fu would have been printed every day while VG (Norway's leading tabloid) would only be allowed to come out at 1200 year intervals.*

Georg Johannesen



# On the use of martial arts techniques

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Tony Brown, Kung fu and Tai chi coach

This performance, depicts an old warrior who's lost everything in the war and barely has strength to fight but has no choice. The martial technique shown in this portrayal, (including spear, staff and sword-play), comes from traditional teachers who's lineage is traced back to the Shaolin temple.

The sounds and facial expressions originate from the Iron Wire System, which utilizes 5 emotions; Anger, Fear, Shock, Grief and Joy.

I would like to acknowledge the late WJ Chung, (NYC Chinatown), the late Madame Wong Jurong, (Shanghai China), Mark, Gin Foon, (Kwong Sai Province), Tan Ching Ngee, (Singapore) and the Ling Nan Hung Gar family (Hong Kong, Taiwan and North America), for preserving these arts.

Last but certainly not least, I thank the Director, Tor Arne Ursin and Actress Geddy Aniksdal for their hard work and patience interpreting my martial arts coaching. I am humbled by their persistence and focus, and sincerely hope you appreciate the performance as much as I enjoyed working with them.

# Credits

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<b>Actor:</b>	Geddy Åniksdal
<b>Director:</b>	Tor Arne Ursin
<b>Music:</b>	Guttorm Guttormsen
<b>Sound production:</b>	Carl-Viktor Guttormsen
<b>Scenography:</b>	Anna Andrea Vik Aniksdal
<b>Shadow wheel and armour:</b>	Zoe Christiansen
<b>Martial arts instructor:</b>	Sifu Tony Brown
<b>Seamstress:</b>	Linda Beate Sollie
<b>Hat:</b>	Unni Bang-Andersen
<b>Mask:</b>	Heidi Elisabeth Rød
<b>Blacksmith:</b>	Odin Brubakken
<b>Light design:</b>	Jean-Vincent Kerebel
<b>Photo:</b>	Dag Jenssen
<b>Program:</b>	Anna Andrea Vik Aniksdal
<b>Producer:</b>	Hans Petter Eliassen
<b>Technical assistance:</b>	Einar Ottestad, Agnar Ribe and Lars Løberg

## Special thanks to:

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