

I SWEAR I HEARD THIS...
INSPIRED BY “DARK WINDOWS”
BY RUPERT HINE

Asya Draganova

I swear I heard this – the sound of thunder, the abrupt arrival of torrential rain, the picture of a day becoming dark as night for all but three, maybe three and a half minutes... or a lifetime, should I say? As I remember it so well, a yesterday from thirty years ago (or more). Wandering, wandering in the stormy foreign streets of the unknown: the future as imagined by a child. “Dark windows, ah, who would be a hero?”

They say that children’s memory is like a flash – it appears suddenly, lights up the whole world around it, and then it’s gone. I don’t even remember where I read that; it must have been another childhood lightning moment.

I swear I heard this when I was very small, the sound of loudest thunder and I thought “let’s see the storm”. But instead, I found all doors and windows open, and very much not dark – a day crisp and bright and baby blue as spring herself – but I swear, I heard this sound, this song, that took me somewhere else. And not a word I understood from it: the melody, the voice, the thunder, the lightest light and darkest dark, and everything in between, as visual as can be, like the skies of the oil paintings of the masters of the art. And I swear I heard this, it was very loud: coming from my dad’s old speakers, which were taller than, than me. The stereo for cassette and vinyl, which was already old, when I was small, a musical totem of some sort, a relic of my father’s youth, the Hitachi of his dreams, the investment of his savings from before the Wall* fell down, from before I had arrived.

I don’t think I’d heard anything as loud before; the words exchanged drowned in the thunder of the song, oh, how the big sound made us smaller – me, my mum and dad, and somehow united us three in the silence imposed. Was I forced to listen? Maybe. And I loved it anyway.

I swear I heard this song again not long ago. “Another dreamless night”, it must have been, and it took me home, faster than any plane would do. Where the air carries that strong smell of freedom, the open windows of a childhood “careless on a sunlit sea”. Captured in what turns out to be the unlikely (English) love song of my (Bulgarian) parents. And now that I can’t help but understand the lyrics, I know this is not a romantic track at all, or not conventionally so: there is something else to it – the photographic quality of the memory of hearing it somewhere, sometime. The ability to then return to that photograph and experience the *saudade* – the longing and melancholy – that bring both darkness and light through the windows as we take our past with us. We’re somewhere new. But the old stereo – and now even older – is still there. Silent. But there. For me to look at and remember my first encounters with music.



P.S. I once wrote to producer and musician Rupert Hine (1947 – 2020), a letter through his website about “Dark Windows” and what it meant to me and my parents – our little trio. I never heard back, but I hope he read it anyway, I guess I’ll never know. On this date (14 March 2025) the song has 33,625 plays on Spotify. Does that make it unsuccessful in some ways? Or does it add to the intimacy of sharing the storm with only few.

*Berlin Wall

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My parents, my fellow listeners, 1990s