

Sisters are Life Partners, Too  
2-part treble, piano  
JH - C056

Jocelyn Hagen

pdf - \$2.15  
printed - \$3.55



# Sisters are Life Partners, Too

from *The Song Poet*

2-part treble choir and piano



in

jocelyn hagen



“Sisters are Life Partners, Too” is taken from the opera *The Song Poet* by librettist Kao Kalia Yang and composer Jocelyn Hagen. It was commissioned by Minnesota Opera and premiered in March 2023. *The Song Poet* is the first Hmong story to be adapted for the operatic stage, and it is based on Kao Kalia Yang’s much acclaimed 2017 memoir of a Hmong family’s desperate escape from the war-torn mountains of Laos into a Thai refugee camp and ultimately to a challenging life as refugees in the United States.

Kalia and her sister Dawb share a special bond. This song, near the end of the opera, gives them a chance to share their dreams and fears for the future, under the weight of their parents’ expectations.

It is recommended to read the spoken lines with the piano accompaniment, as written, to give the audience more context for the song. There is one line that is repeated in the Hmong language several times: *Viv ncaus thiab yog khub ua neej thiab*. Go to [GraphitePublishing.com](http://GraphitePublishing.com) to listen to a recording of this text being spoken and sung. The Hmong melodic lines throughout the opera were composed by Bee Yang (Kalia’s father, the song poet) and transcribed by Jocelyn Hagen.

## KAO KALIA YANG:



Kao Kalia Yang is a Hmong American teacher, speaker, and writer. Her work crosses audiences and genres. She is the award-winning author of the memoirs, *The Latehomecomer*, *The Song Poet*, *Somewhere in the Unknown World*, and

*Where Rivers Part*. Yang’s work has been recognized by the National Endowment for the Arts, the National Book Critics Circle Award, the Chautauqua Prize, the PEN USA literary awards, the Dayton’s Literary Peace Prize, as Notable Books by the American Library Association, Kirkus Best Books of the Year, the Heartland Bookseller’s Award, and garnered four Minnesota Book Awards. Yang is McKnight, Soros, and Guggenheim fellow.

## SETTING THE SCENE:

*Kalia and Dawb have opened up a writing agency. On the walls, there are degrees hanging: Dawb with a BA from Hamline University, Dawb with a JD from Hamline Law School, Kalia with a BA from Carleton College, Kalia with a MFA from Columbia University’s School of the Arts. There are two desks, opposite each other in a long room. In between, there’s a red couch on a floor mat made of bamboo, a small coffee table in between. There are orchids at every window. The room is filled with light.*

Sisters are life partners, too.

*Viv ncaus thiab yog khub ua neej thiab.*

When we were small,

And the cold came through the walls,

Our feet rested side by side,

We shared our bodies’ heat.

Sisters are life partners, too.

*Viv ncaus yog khub ua neej thiab.*

When we got bigger,

And we saw more clearly,

The magnitude of our mother and father’s dreams,

It was to me, It was to you,

We’d scream our fears and find our faiths...

In each other.

Sisters are life partners, too.

*Viv ncaus yog khub ua neej thiab.*

Now, we are young women,

In the place where our dreams will grow,

We are afraid,

We’ll have nothing to show,

Show the world,

That our mother and father have done a good job,

Found in the place of war: love.

Taken from a place of despair: hope.

Raised from very little: possibility.

Sisters are life partners, too.

*Viv ncaus yog khub ua neej thiab.*

~ Kao Kalia Yang



*From the production of The Song Poet: Kalia and Dawb as children.*

# Sisters are Life Partners, Too

from the opera *The Song Poet*  
2-part treble choir and piano

Libretto by:  
Kao Kalia Yang

Jocelyn Hagen  
with additional Hmong  
lyrics set by Bee Yang

Do not photocopy.

For perusal only.

Kalia and Dawb have opened a writing agency. On the walls, there are degrees hanging: Dawb with a BA from Hamline University, Dawb with a JD from Hamline Law School, Kalia with a BA from Carleton College, Kalia with a MFA from Columbia University's School of the Arts. There are two desks, opposite each other in a long room. In between, there's a red couch on a floor mat made of bamboo, a small black coffee table in between. There are orchids at every window. The room is filled with light.

*Moderato* ♩ = 58

jocelyn hagen

### SPOKEN DIALOGUE

**Kalia:** Mom and Dad took a second mortgage on their house so we can get the line of credit to open up this office. I can't believe it.

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**Dawb:** What is there to believe?  
You deserve the best. What did I tell you?  
Our life in America is like a ladder,  
I'm the first step so you can be the second.  
I went to Hamline, so you could go further.  
I became a lawyer, so you can become a writer.  
If you complete your book, this will be worth it.

15

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**Kalia:** I wish I believed  
in myself the way you  
believe in me.

21

# Jocelyn Hagen

Kalia and Dawb act out moment by moment in the space between their desks.

**Dawb:** Remember when I came back home after going to my first play, and pounded on the bathroom door and yelled, "Kalia, acting happens in real life not just on TV!"

**B**

26

**Kalia:** Remember when you ate with your first silver spoon, and came home, and went into Mom's special suitcase from Thailand, and took out a silver coin, and put it on my tongue so I wouldn't be weirded out by the taste of silver?

31

39

Dawb: Remember when I went to the mall and bought you your very first diamond, so tiny but glittery it danced on your finger, because I said you should get the very best of what we could afford?

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For perusal only.

45

Kalia: Remember when you all left me at college with a cardboard box in my hands, and later in my room, I opened up a laptop that had taken all of Mom and Dad's savings to buy?

50

Dawb: I remember when you were first born and Dad said to me that when all is said and done, when the lovers and friends have come and gone, we will share more of each other's lives than with anyone else.

C

A little slower ♩ = 100

55

Dawb: Sisters are life partners, too.

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61 **D** *mf*

S *ab.* \_\_\_\_\_ When we were small, And the cold came through the walls, \_\_\_\_\_

A *ab.* \_\_\_\_\_ When we were small, And the cold came through the walls, \_\_\_\_\_

*mp*

66

S Our feet rest-ed side by side, We shared our bo-dies' heat.

A \_\_\_\_\_ Our feet rest-ed side by side, We shared our bo-dies' heat. \_\_\_\_\_

66

*mf* *mp*

Do not photocopy.

**E**

*mf* *f* *p*

76 *mf*

S Sis - ters are life part - ners, too. Viv ncaus thiab yog khub ua neej thi-

A Sis - ters are life part - ners, too. Viv ncaus thiab yog khub ua neej thi-  
Sisters are life partners, too.

76 *mf*

80 **F**

S ab. \_\_\_\_\_ When we got big - ger, And we saw more

A ab. \_\_\_\_\_ When we got big - ger, And we saw more

80 *p* *mp*

in the background

84 *f*

S clear - ly \_\_\_\_\_ The mag - ni - tude of our mo - ther and fa - ther's

A clear - ly \_\_\_\_\_ The mag - ni - tude of our mo - ther and fa - ther's

84 *mf* *f*

88 **G** *mf*

S dreams, \_\_\_\_\_ It was to me, It was to you, We'd

A dreams, \_\_\_\_\_ It was to me, It was to you, We'd

88 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3

*mp*

92 *f* **Playfully**

S scream our fears and find our faiths... In each o - ther. In each o - ther.

A scream our fears and find our faiths... In each o - ther. In each o - ther. In each

92 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3

*f* *p* *mf*

96 **H** *mf*

S \_\_\_\_\_ In each o - ther. Sis - ters are life part - ners, too. Viv ncaus thiab yog

A o - ther. \_\_\_\_\_ Sis - ters are life part - ners, too. Viv ncaus thiab yog

96 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3

*p* *mf*

Sisters are life partners, too.

I

100

S *f* *f*  
khub ua neej thi - ab. Now, we are young wo - men,

A *f* *f*  
khub ua neej thi - ab. Now, we are young wo - men,

100 *fp*  
*p* *mf*

104

S In the place where our dreams will grow.

A In the place where our dreams will grow.

104

107

S *ff* We are a - fraid, We'll have no - thing to show, no - thing to

A *ff* We are a - fraid, We'll have no - thing to show,

107

110

S show, \_\_\_\_\_ Show the world, That our mo-ther and

A no-thing to show. Show the world, \_\_\_\_\_ That our mo-ther and

110

*f*

113

S fa-ther have done a good \_\_\_\_\_ job. \_\_\_\_\_ Found in the place \_\_\_\_\_ of war: \_\_\_\_\_

A fa-ther have done a good \_\_\_\_\_ job. \_\_\_\_\_ Found in the place \_\_\_\_\_ of war: \_\_\_\_\_

113

*mf*

117

S love. \_\_\_\_\_ Ta-ken from a place \_\_\_\_\_ of des-pair: \_\_\_\_\_

A love. love. \_\_\_\_\_ Ta-ken from a place \_\_\_\_\_ of des-pair: \_\_\_\_\_

117

*mp* *mf*

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121 *mp* *p*

S hope. \_\_\_\_\_ Raised from ve - ry lit - tle: pos - si - bi - li - ty. \_\_\_\_\_

A hope. \_\_\_\_\_ Raised from ve - ry lit - tle: pos - si - bi - li - ty. \_\_\_\_\_

121 *p* *pp* *mp*

126 *rit.*

S \_\_\_\_\_

A \_\_\_\_\_

126 *mp*

**K** Slowly ♩ = 80

*Sweetly mp* *rit.*

S *Viv ncaus thiab yog khub ua neej thi - ab.*

A *Viv ncaus thiab yog khub ua neej thi - ab.*

130 *p*

*Sisters are life partners, too.*

# Jocelyn Hagen



Jocelyn Hagen composes music that has been described as “simply magical” (Fanfare Magazine) and “dramatic and deeply moving” (Star Tribune, Minneapolis/St. Paul). She is a pioneer in the field of composition, pushing the expectations of musicians and audiences with large-scale multimedia works, electro-acoustic music, dance, opera, and publishing. Her first forays into composition were via songwriting, still very evident in her work. The majority of her compositions are for the voice: solo, chamber and choral. Her melodic music is rhythmically driven and texturally complex, rich in color and deeply heartfelt.

In 2019 and 2020, choirs and orchestras across the country are premiering her multimedia symphony *The Notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci* that includes video projections created by a team of visual artists, highlighting da Vinci’s spectacular drawings, inventions, and texts. Hagen describes her process of composing for choir, orchestra and film simultaneously in a Tedx Talk given at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, now available on YouTube. Her dance opera collaboration with choreographer Penelope Freeh, *Test Pilot*, received the 2017 American Prize in the musical theater/opera division as well as a Sage Award for “Outstanding Design.” The panel declared the work “a tour de force of originality.”

In 2013 Hagen released an EP entitled MASHUP, in which she performs Debussy’s “Doctor Gradus ad Parnassum” while singing Ed Sheeran’s “The A Team.” She is also one half of the band Nation, an a cappella duo with composer/performer Timothy C. Takach, and together they perform and serve as clinicians for choirs from all over the world.

Hagen’s commissions include *Conspirare*, the Minnesota Opera, the Minnesota Orchestra, the International Federation of Choral Music, the American Choral Directors Association of Minnesota, Georgia, Connecticut and Texas, the North Dakota Music Teachers Association, Cantus, the Boston Brass, the Metropolitan Symphony Orchestra and the St. Olaf Band, among many others. Her work is independently published through JH Music, as well as through Graphite Publishing, G. Schirmer, ECS Publishing, Fred Bock Music Publishing, Santa Barbara Music Publishing, and Boosey and Hawkes.

## Independently published choral works by Jocelyn Hagen:

Agnus Dei, from <i>Ashes of Roses</i>	TTB div. a cappella, Bar. solo
April and the Sun	SATB a cappella choir
Benedictus, from <i>amass</i>	SSAATTBB a cappella choir, SATB soli
Divine Image	treble choir, women’s choir, SSATB choir, oboe and piano
Endless	SATB choir, 2 violins and piano
Forgotten	SSA choir, oboe and piano
I Saw Two Clouds at Morning	SSAATTBB a cappella choir
Ladies in Green	SSA choir and piano
Moon Goddess	SSA choir, 4-hand piano, percussion
Numeri Atque Voces	TTBB and SATB choirs
On My Dreams	SATB div. choir, piano, opt. trap set
Ophelia	SATB a cappella choir
Prayer	SA div. choir, violin and piano
Salve, Regina	SSA a cappella choir
Sanctus, from <i>amass</i>	SSATBB a cappella choir, SA soli
Someone Will Remember Us	SSAA choir, violin, viola, cello and harp
Trees Need Not Walk the Earth	SATB choir, piano, marimba & rain stick
Veni, Sancte Spiritus	SATB a cappella choir

### Extended works for chorus

Ashes of Roses (48’)	requiem for SATB choir, orchestra, and soloists
amass (65’)	SATB choir, STB soli, cello solo, cello quartet, guitar and percussion trio
Here I Am (45’)	SATB choir, treble choir, S solo, chamber ensemble & illuminated portraits
The Notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci (35’)	SATB choir, orchestra or chamber orchestra, video projections
Songs for Muska (70’)	SATB choir, soloists, violin, cello, mandolin, harp, 2 percussionists
Swimming Into Winter (17’)	SATB (divisi) choir, winds and percussion