

**PUT THIS DESIGN IN YOUR CARPET:
Feldman, Biscardi and Partovi**

The correspondence below between composers Chester Biscardi and Zahra Partovi was occasioned by the publication, by Vincent FitzGerald & Co (New York: 2019), of a limited edition of the score of Partovi's composition, *Love Lines* for soprano, alto, and violin, accompanied by a studio recording. Delighted to be gifted a copy of this publication, Biscardi's insightful comments, and Partovi's adept replies, make fascinating reading. Both composers are great Feldman fans. The exchange reveals the subtle ways in which Partovi was influenced by, and pays homage to, Feldman, and underlines the fact that Feldman's reputation continues to grow, not only through the ever increasing number of performances and recordings, but also through his ever growing influence on a wide range of contemporary composers.

Chester Biscardi: Letter to Zahra Partovi, August 19, 2020

Zahra,

Forgive the *computerese*, but my response to *Love Lines* would end up being tiny, incoherent scribbles in the little notecard in which this is folded, somewhat like trying to fit one of Cinderella's abhorrent sister's misshapen feet into her delicate glass slipper.

Setting Rumi to music since the 15th century—what a wonderful tradition to continue—a connection to the past, a continuity. Your longtime reading of his work is seen in how you extract

the essence of each unique line of poetry. I love your description of how you've grouped the various lines, choosing "the elixir of the poet's philosophy about love."

When I first perused the manuscript, I was struck by the seemingly straightforward notation—sparse, long overlaid notes, sharp but delicate occasional interjections, Feldmanesque elements but not really. What your score does is allow for the sensitive ebbs and flows, dynamically and temporally, of the music. The music "breathes" in the musical shapes and in the silences. In the "Welcome Ladder," for example, the hairpin dynamics create their own miniature forms and support the "soaring" that you suggest in setting "The Beloved's Longing is Your Welcome Ladder" toward the end.

Interesting addition of the spoken voice in "Nation of Love" as well as adopting medieval techniques such as hocket. That you hearken back with these gestures makes the living music of a work in the 21st century, which is also infused with minimalist techniques, especially powerful and at times poignant. And the embedding of a "Private Prayer" in "Beloved is All" adds to the spiritual nature that's present, of course, in all of Rumi's work.

Thinning the texture for a moment in "Sea of Sorrow" not only also looks back to what, say, a vocal composer in the 15th century would do but is a simple heralding of what this is all about: Love. And, finally, the ricochet of the violin in transporting us into a settling in of the journey from Us to The Other.

So beautiful and touching, Zahra. And this is a very convincing performance—the vocalists are perfect in how they use focused, pure, clear sounds—for the most part without vibrato—making the poetry perfectly understandable—a real trick in vocal music

whether solo or choral. I love your addition of the violin and its blending with the two female voices, its “non-voice” a perfect match and textural counterpoint to the singers. It’s so interesting to hear the poetry in the original language at the beginning, setting up the experience in a richer, broader way.

Two notational questions. Is there a visual reason you write the high Bs & Cs in the violin without using 8va? And I’m wondering about the necessity of using 25/4 in II, for example, since there’s no way that that can be “felt.” An empty time signature seems better suited.

What a beautiful package all around, including the calling card boxed flash drive! And I’m honored to receive the 15th copy of the limited edition of 50 copies. Alas, I didn’t know that Noa Ain [the dedicatee of *Love Lines*] had passed. I hadn’t seen her in a long while, but I used to be involved with Opera Ebony where I met her. Very interesting musician.

So, thanks so much for sending this work along. And let’s most definitely keep in good touch.

Best, Chet.

Listening to your music and wondering how Rumi found
Feldman . . .

PUT THIS DESIGN IN YOUR CARPET

Any movement or sound is a profession of faith,
as the millstone grinding is explaining
how it believes in the river!
No metaphor can say this,
but I can’t stop pointing to the beauty.

Every movement and place says,
“Put this design in your carpet!”

I want to be in such a passionate adoration
that my tent gets pitched against the sky.

Let the beloved come
and sit like a guard dog
in front of the tent.

*When the ocean surges,
don't let me just hear it.
Let it splash inside my chest.*

Zahra Partovi: Reply to Chester Biscardi's Letter

Dear Chet,

I was so very touched to receive your letter the other day. And what a treat to get a real letter delivered by USPS!

I can't thank you enough Chet for examining the score and listening to the music so intensely, and of course for your kind and beautiful words about the composition and the whole publication. Your letter is what one dreams of when creating something.

I am normally a very fast worker, but these songs have been in the making for a long time. Of course I have been studying Rumi's philosophy about 'love' for decades. But about four years ago, I felt compelled to set these particular verses to music. And I was blessed to have these wonderful performers feeling the music so deeply.

Now about the two odd notations! Of course putting 8va in the score makes reading much easier. However, when you actually go high up above the ledger lines, it has a different emotional component for the performer, who will feel the soaring aspect of the high notes much stronger.

And the use of 25/4 time signature has a little story. Some years ago, madly in love with Morton Feldman, I was searching for a composition teacher who was very familiar with Feldman's music. At the suggestion of Chris Villars, whom I had just met and whose help and encouragement influenced all my Feldman projects, I contacted Nils Vigeland and asked if he would be my teacher. He said no, and that he had retired from teaching.

But after perusing some of my earlier compositions, he said he would be open to giving me 'guidance' anytime I needed his advice. During this time he has critiqued my compositions with commentary. Once he told me that Feldman used to give an assignment to his students to make a composition in 25/4 time. The reason was to throw the performer out of the traditional time signatures and make the counting almost impossible. That way, the rhythm would be somewhat off, wavering, hovering with no sense of downbeat. When we were rehearsing, the performers adjusted to the time and had no complaint. But when we were recording in the studio, the engineer who is a composer himself, kept having difficulty. He would try to count and tell the performers that they were off a split second! Finally,

I explained to him that it was meant to be like that. Now, I don't really know if the whole intention worked or not, but for better or for worse, this time signature gave a little homage to my hero!

Feldman makes no reference to Persian poetry, but there is an undeniable connection between Persian poetry and all other Persian arts including the rugs. Interestingly, the asymmetry Feldman was so enamored by in Persian rugs, permeates Rumi's poetry, which defies many traditional rhymes and rhythms of his predecessors.

Thank you Chet for your letter! With love and gratitude, Zahra.

Note: Further details of the *Love Lines* publication can be found here:

www.cnvill.net/LOVE-LINES-Liner-Notes.pdf