



I asked the wind

*I taught the children of the world
how to spell your name;
but their lips suddenly changed
into mulberry trees.*

*I asked the wind
to comb the locks
of your anthracite hair;
but the wind refused:
for, time was too short,
and your hair was too long.*

Setting verses from the collection
One hundred love letters by Nizar Qabbani,
in Arabic and English, translated by the composer,
for nine-part treble chorus (SSSMMMAAA) *a cappella*

Eric Banks

Commissioned by Anthony Trecek-King, and composed
in August 2012 for the Boston Children's Chorus.

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About this work

Nizar Qabbani was born in 1923 in Syria to a traditional, well-to-do family. Qabbani's poetry has been described "more powerful than all the Arab regimes put together" (*Lebanese Daily Star*), and "like water, bread, and sun in every Arab heart and house" (*Tishreen*). Qabbani's verses are simple and direct, describing everyday life. He was a constant campaigner for women's rights, and a great many of his poems praise the beauty of the feminine form. He was an Arab nationalist, but often criticized Arab dictators for the lack of freedom that they caused throughout the Arab world. He worked as a diplomat in Syria for more than two decades, but settled in London in the mid-1960's for political reasons. Qabbani died in London in 1998, and is buried in Damascus.

Here are the ten lines of *I asked the wind* in their original Arabic, and in IPA (the International Phonetic Alphabet):

ʕællæmut ʔɔʔfæɫæɫ-ʕæɫɪm
kæɪfæ tuhæʕʕunæ-smækɪ;
fætæɦɫællæt ʃɪfæɦuɦum
ʕɪlæ ʕæʕʕærɪ tut.

ʔwsoʔtur-riɦæ
ʕæn tumæʃʃɪʔɔ xusʕɔɫɪ
ʕɔɪrækɪɪ-fæɦɪm;
fɔɪtæðæræt bɪʕænnæ:
wɔqtæɦæ qɔʕɪr
wæ ʕɔɪrækɪ ʔwɪl.

Here is a pronunciation key of the IPA for Arabic vowels:

æ	between bat and bet
ɔ	as in bought
ʌ	as in but
i	as in beet
ɪ	as in bit
ʊ	as in book
u	as in boot

And a key of the IPA for Arabic consonants:

bdfkhlmnstz	are pronounced as in English
ɖʂʦ	are retroflex versions of their English equivalent, and are pronounced with the back of the tongue raised to the palate
ʕ	a velar approximative, pronounced as the ɹ̥ as in <i>song</i> without touching the tongue to the palate
ð	a voiced fricative, as in <i>thus</i>
θ	an unvoiced fricative, as in <i>thin</i>
ɦ	a 'glasses-fogging' version of h, high in the mouth
q	a guttural k, produced in the back of the throat
r	a lightly flipped r, as in Italian
ʁ	a guttural r, as in French
ʃ	an unvoiced fricative, as in <i>shin</i>
ʒ	a voiced fricative, as in <i>pleasure</i>
x	as in the German <i>ich</i>
ʔ	the glottal stop, as in 'us
j	as in <i>yet</i>
w	as in <i>wet</i>

عَلَّمَتْ أَطْفَالَ الْعِلْمِ
كَيْفَ تَهْجُونَ اسْمَكَ؛
فَتَحَوَّلَتْ شِفَاهَهُمْ
إِلَى أَشْجَارِ تَوْتِ.
أَوْصَيْتَ الرِّيحَ
أَنْ تَمْشِطَ خِصَلَاتِ
شَعْرِكَ الْفَاحِمِ؛
فَاعْتَذَرْتَ بِأَنْ:
وَقَّتْهَا قَصِيرِ
وَ شَعْرِكَ طَوِيلِ.

The pitches of this piece (G Ab B C D Eb F# G) comprise a transposition of the maqam Suzidil. The translation of Nizar Qabbani's poem is my own, and has been tailored especially for this work.



Blusteringly ♩ = 216 (♩ = 108; ♩ = 72)
(beat 3+2+2+3 throughout)

I asked the wind

Eric Banks

mf

S1 I taught... I taught the

S2

S3

M1

M2

M3

A1

A2 *mp* 'ɒt - fæ - læl - fæ - lɪm...

A3 *mp* fæel - læ - mut... fæel - læ - mut... fæel - læ - mut...

5

S1 child - ren... I taught the child - ren of the

S2

S3

M1

M2 *mp* fæ - tæ - ɪl - wæl - læt...

M3 *mp* tu - hæʒ - ʒu - næ - smæ - ki, tu - hæʒ - ʒu - næ - smæ - ki,

A1 *mp* kæi - fæ... kæi - fæ... kæi - fæ... kæi - fæ...

A2 'ɒt - fæ - læl - fæ - lɪm... 'ɒt - fæ - læl - fæ - lɪm... 'ɒt - fæ - læl - fæ - lɪm... 'ɒt -

A3 fæel - læ - mut... fæel - læ - mut... fæel - læ - mut...

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9

S1 world _____ how to spell your name;

S2 _____

S3 _____

M1 _____

M2 fæ - tæ - HA - ^wæɫ - læt... fæ - tæ - HA - ^wæɫ - læt... fæ - tæ - HA - ^wæɫ - læt... fæ - tæ -

M3 tu - hæʒ - ʒu - næ - smæ - ki, tu - hæʒ - ʒu - næ - smæ - ki, tu - hæʒ - ʒu - næ - smæ - ki,

A1 _____

A2 fæ - læɪ - ɹæ - lɪm... 'oʊ - fæ - læɪ - ɹæ - lɪm... 'oʊ - fæ - læɪ - ɹæ - lɪm... 'oʊ - fæ - læɪ -

A3 ɹæɪ - læ - mut... ɹæɪ - læ - mut... ɹæɪ - læ - mut...

13

S1 but _____ their _____ lips... _____ their _____ lips _____

S2 ʒæ - ri tut... 'æɪ - ʒæ - ri tut... 'æɪ - ʒæ - ri tut... 'æɪ - ʒæ - ri

S3 _____

M1 _____

M2 HA - ^wæɫ - læt... fæ - tæ - HA - ^wæɫ - læt... fæ - tæ - HA - ^wæɫ - læt... fæ - tæ - HA - ^wæɫ - læt...

M3 tu - hæʒ - ʒu - næ - smæ - ki, tu - hæʒ - ʒu - næ - smæ - ki, tu - hæʒ - ʒu - næ - smæ - ki, tu -

A1 _____

A2 ɹæ - lɪm... 'oʊ - fæ - læɪ - ɹæ - lɪm... 'oʊ - fæ - læɪ - ɹæ - lɪm... 'oʊ - fæ - læɪ - ɹæ - lɪm...

A3 ɹæɪ - læ - mut... ɹæɪ - læ - mut... ɹæɪ - læ - mut...

17 *f* sud-den-ly changed... changed in - to mul - - - ber - ry

S2 tut... 'æj - ʒæ - ri tut... 'æj - ʒæ - ri tut... 'æj - ʒæ - ri tut...

S3 'i - læ... 'i - læ... 'i - læ...

M1]i - fæ - hu - hum...]i - fæ - hu - hum...]i - fæ - hu - hum...

M2 fæ - tæ - ɥæ - læt... fæ - tæ - ɥæ - læt... fæ - tæ - ɥæ - læt...

M3 hæ3 - ʒu - næ - smæ - ki, tu - hæ3 - ʒu - næ - smæ - ki, tu - hæ3 - ʒu - næ - smæ - ki, tu - hæ3 - ʒu - næ -

A1 *mf* kæj - fæ... kæj - fæ... kæj - fæ...

A2 'ot - fæ - læl - ʒæ - lɪm... 'ot - fæ - læl - ʒæ - lɪm... 'ot - fæ - læl - ʒæ - lɪm...

A3 ʒæ - læ - mut... ʒæ - læ - mut... ʒæ - læ - mut... ʒæ - læ -

21 *subito* trees, mul - - - ber - ry trees, *mf subito*

S2 'æj - ʒæ - ri tut... 'æj - ʒæ - ri tut... 'æj - ʒæ - ri tut...

S3 'i - læ... 'i - læ... 'i - læ... 'i - læ...

M1]i - fæ - hu - hum...]i - fæ - hu - hum...]i - fæ - hu - hum...]i -

M2 fæ - tæ - ɥæ - læt... fæ - tæ - ɥæ - læt... fæ - tæ - ɥæ - læt...

M3 smæ - ki, tu - hæ3 - ʒu - næ - smæ - ki, tu - hæ3 - ʒu - næ - smæ - ki, tu - hæ3 - ʒu - næ -

A1 *f* kæj - fæ... kæj - fæ... kæj - fæ... *subito*

A2 *f* 'ot - fæ - læl - ʒæ - lɪm... 'ot - fæ - læl - ʒæ - lɪm... 'ot - fæ - læl - ʒæ - lɪm... *subito*

A3 *f* mut... ʒæ - læ - mut... ʒæ - læ - mut... ʒæ - læ - mut... *subito*

25 *mf* mul - - - ber - ry trees, *mp* mul - - - ber - ry

S1

S2 'æf-3æ - ri tut... 'æf-3æ - ri tut... 'æf-3æ - ri tut...

S3 'i - læ... 'i - læ... 'i - læ...

M1 fæ - hu - hum... ʃi - fæ - hu - hum... ʃi - fæ - hu - hum... ʃi - fæ - hu - hum...

M2 fæ - tæ - HA - wæl - læt... fæ - tæ - HA - wæl - læt... fæ - tæ - HA - wæl - læt...

M3 smæ - ki, tu - hæ3 - zu - næ - smæ - ki, tu - hæ3 - zu - næ - smæ - ki, tu - hæ3 - zu - næ - smæ - ki,

A1 *mf* kæi - fæ... kæi - fæ... kæi - fæ... kæi - fæ... *mp*

A2 'ot - fæ - læl - ʃæ - lim... 'ot - fæ - læl - ʃæ - lim... 'ot - fæ - læl - ʃæ - lim... 'ot -

A3 *mf* ʃæ - læ - mut... ʃæ - læ - mut... ʃæ - læ - mut...

29 *p* trees, mul - - - ber - ry trees...

S1

S2 'æf-3æ - ri tut... 'æf-3æ - ri tut...

S3 'i - læ... 'i - læ...

M1 ʃi - fæ - hu - hum... ʃi - fæ - hu - hum...

M2 fæ - tæ - HA - wæl - læt... fæ - tæ - HA - wæl - læt... fæ - tæ - HA - wæl - læt...

M3 tu - hæ3 - zu - næ - smæ - ki, tu - hæ3 - zu - næ - smæ - ki, tu - hæ3 - zu - næ - smæ - ki,

A1 kæi - fæ... kæi - fæ... kæi - fæ...

A2 fæ - læl - ʃæ - lim... 'ot - fæ - læl - ʃæ - lim... 'ot - fæ - læl - ʃæ - lim... 'ot - fæ - læl -

A3 *mp* ʃæ - læ - mut... ʃæ - læ - mut... ʃæ - læ - mut...

33

mf come capelli lunghi

S1 *mf* come capelli lunghi 'ɔw - soj - tur - ri - hæ...

S2 *p* come un pettine I asked the wind to comb the

S3 *mf* come capelli lunghi 'ɔw - soj - tur - ri - hæ...

M1 *p* come un pettine I asked the wind to comb the

M2 *mf* come capelli lunghi 'ɔw - soj - tur - ri - hæ...

M3 *p* come un pettine I asked the wind to comb the

A1 *mf* come capelli lunghi 'ɔw - soj - tur - ri - hæ...

A2 *p* come un pettine fæ - lɪm... I asked the wind to comb the

A3 *p* fæl - læ - mut... *mf* come capelli lunghi 'ɔw - soj - tur - ri - hæ...

39

S1 'æɪn tu - mæj - fɪ - tɔ xu - ʃu - lo - ti... xu - ʃu -

S2 locks of your an-thra-cite hair;

S3 'æɪn tu - mæj - fɪ - tɔ xu - ʃu - lo - ti... xu - ʃu - lo - ti

M1 locks of your an-thra-cite hair;

M2 'æɪn tu - mæj - fɪ - tɔ xu - ʃu - lo - ti... xu - ʃu - lo - ti ʃɔŋ -

M3 locks of your an-thra-cite hair;

A1 'æɪn tu - mæj - fɪ - tɔ xu - ʃu - lo - ti... xu - ʃu - lo - ti ʃɔŋ - ræ - kil -

A2 locks of your an-thra-cite hair;

A3 'æɪn tu - mæj - fɪ - tɔ xu - ʃu - lo - ti... xu - ʃu - lo - ti ʃɔŋ - ræ - kil - fæ - nɪm;

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