

The Houri and the Poet

Lisa Bielawa

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Note

Premiere: September 25, 2010, Tenri Cultural Institute, NYC. For John Gidwitz from his family on the occasion of his 70th birthday

Duration: 6'
Instrumentation: Soprano, Piano, Cello

The text for *The Houri and the Poet* is taken from Goethe's epic poem entitled *West-Eastern Divan*. This section was written when the poet was 70 years old and at the height of his "Orientalist" period, which brought forth many rich poems influenced by forms and topics from the East.

The divan was a traditional form used by Islamic poets that Goethe admired. Like scriptural forms, it was divided into Books, each of which might focus on particular characters and themes. The dialogue used in this song is taken from the "Book of Paradise," which was the twelfth and last section of the *Divan*.

A Houri (one of the pure beings in Paradise who provide celestial partnership to those who enter) is guarding the gates of Paradise. She questions the Poet when he approaches because she knows she is only supposed to let heroes enter Paradise, and he doesn't seem to have any battle scars. He beckons her to look more closely, explaining that as a Poet he bears the wounds of Life and Love deep within him – and is therefore even more heroic than those who wage battle, because his wounds have enabled him to inspire others and ignite passion and love within them!

– Lisa Bielawa

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