

Muska Landay

For amplified speaking voice, a.m. radio, cello and tam tam.

Cat Hope (2021)

A contemplation dedicated to the resilience of and rebellion by Afghan women.

The score is proportional, with the highest point of the screen being the highest pitch reference, the bottom being the lowest pitch reference. Line thickness indicates dynamic (should be very soft as a starting point). **TamTam**: each line is a single large, soft mallet/superball. Small dots are staccato effects. The first figure is a two mallet figure. **Cello**: double stops indicated by two lines. Small dots are pizzicato. The voice should be spoken in a droll tone. The a.m. radio should be tuned to static and the volume never above soft, and the volume manipulated as notated. Vertical dotted lines signal important ensemble coordination points.

Program Note

This piece is set to an English translation of an Afghan Landay, conceived by Rhalia Muska:

I call. You're stone.

One day you'll look and I'll be gone.

The Landay is an Afghan form of poetry consisting of a single couplet in Pashto, one of two national languages of Afghanistan. Commonly shared orally amongst Pashtan women, these poems consist of 22 syllables – 9 on the first line, 13 on the second. Traditionally, they are sung aloud with the beat of a hand drum. They typically address themes of love, grief, homeland, war, and separation. Like all music, they were banned by the Taliban during 1996 – 2001, and likely again now given the recent Taliban takeover of Afghanistan.

Rahlia Muska (aka Zarmina) (Muska means 'smile' in Pashto) was a teenage girl living in the Taliban stronghold of Gereshk, who recited Landays over the phone to a radio program hosted by Radio Azadi (Liberty). Radio was her only contact with the outside world. However she passed away after setting herself on fire when her brothers had found out she was making poetry. Zarminia's is one of many tragic stories from the women and girls under the Taliban, but her Landays are rebellious and powerful, belying the notion of Afghan women as submissive or defeated.

The graphic score is made by creating musical gestures by tracing over a photograph of flowing burqa's worn by Afghan women under an aircraft, from a photograph by Seamus Murphy. The syllables of this English translation, when combined with the musical gestures, add up to the 22 syllables of the original Pashto version. The voice is spoken and amplified, as if heard on via radio. The work explores the potential of graphic notation to reflect or 'contain' certain aural (oral) traditions that may evolve of time. This Landay was translated into English by Eliza Griswold.

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