

Qasida of Breath

SSAA (div.) a cappella



Words by Deema Shehabi
Music by Mitchell Covington

Palestinian-American poet, Deema Shehabi was born in Kuwait in 1970. Her mother was from Gaza and her father from Jerusalem.

Deema attended The American School of Kuwait, with other Palestinian exiles. The Kuwait of her childhood was a haven for freedom, education, work and a place where she learned to be proud of her Palestinian culture.

In 1988, Deema came to the United States to attend Tufts University and attained a BA in history and international relations. She earned a Master's in 1993 in journalism from Boston University.

In response to the 2007 bombing in Baghdad's Al-Mutanabbi Street, the historic literary district, Shehabi and Beau Beausoleil edited an anthology in 2012 called Al-Mutanabbi Street Starts Here of people's responses to the bombing.

The text of Qasida of Breath evokes her memories of a beautiful land contrasted with the current reality of a world broken by war.

Qasida of Breath

For Voci Women's Vocal Ensemble, Oakland, CA
On their 25th Anniversary

Deema Shehabi

Mitchell Covington (ASCAP)

p *poco* $\text{♩} = 66$

Soprano 1
The call to prayer, the call to prayer at five a.

Soprano 2
The call to prayer, the call to prayer at five a.

Alto 1
The call to prayer, the call to prayer at five a.

Piano
p *poco* $\text{♩} = 66$
For rehearsal only

mp $\text{♩} = 66$

S1
m.* spreads my fing - ers o - ver the scars, ov - er the

S2
m.* spreads my fing - ers ov - er the scars, ov - er the

A1
m.* spreads my fing - ers ov - er the scars, ov - er the

*Pronounce the letter name, "em,"
not the sound, "mm."

6

S1 scars of ap - ple trees, and the smell of sleep - y earth in my

S2 scars of ap - ple trees. and the smell of sleep - y earth in my

A1 scars of ap - ple trees and the smell of sleep - y earth in my

A2 and the smell of sleep - y earth in my

6

S1 hum - ming - birds

S1 love's hair makes hum - ming - birds race,

S2 love's hair, humm,* Hum - ming - birds race

A1 love's hair hum - ming - birds race, hum - ming - birds

A2 love's hair makes Hum - ing birds, hum - ming -

10

10

* Go immediately to the "mm" sound.

12 *f*

S1 hum - ming - birds race in - to the buds of the fus - chia.

S2 humm, Hum - ming - birds race in - to buds of the fus - cia.

A1 race, hum - ming - birds in - to the buds of the fus - cia.

A2 birds, hum - ming - birds, in - to buds of the fus - cia.

14 *mp*

S1 Not long a go, not long a - go the air grew

S2 Not long a - go, not long a - go the air grew

A1 Not long a - go, not long a - go the air grew

A2 Not long a - go the air grew

17 *p* soft, the air grew soft when the sun crawled from rock to

mp

S1

S2 *p* soft, the air grew soft, soft,

A1 *p* soft, the air grew soft, soft, when the sun crawled from

A2 *p* soft, the air grew soft, soft,

mp

20 *p* cloud, And I would pray to ev - ery - thing

mp

S1

S2 *mp* cloud. I would pray to ev - ery - thing

A1 *mp* rock to cloud. And I would pray to ev - ery - thing

A2 *mp* cloud. And I would pray to ev - ery - thing

mp

23

S1 sa - cred and I would bow _____ and stare deep - ly at the earth, _____ and *mf*

S2 sa - cred and I would bow _____ and stare deep - ly at the earth, _____ and *mf*

A1 sa - cred and I would bow _____ and stare deep - ly at the earth, _____ and *mf*

A2 sa - cred, _____ bow _____ at the earth, _____ *mf*

26

S1 walk _____ through old cem - e - tar - ies to find the dead soft - ly

S2 walk through _____ and walk _____ through, _____ to find the dead soft - ly

A1 walk through old cem - e - tar - ies to find the dead soft - ly

A2 walk through old cem - e - tar - ies to find the dead soft - ly

29

S1 *mp* *p* *mp*
gaz ing,, gaz - ing, — gaz ing. Some - times, —

S2 *mp* *p* *mp*
gaz - ing, gaz - ing,, — gaz - ing.. Some - times, —

A1 *mp* *p* *mp*
gaz - ing,, soft - ly gaz - ing,, — gaz - ing., Some - times, —

A2 *mp* *p* *mp*
gaz - ing,, soft - ly gaz - ing,, — gaz - ing. Some - times, —

34

S1 *mf*
some - times, you breathe, you breathe, — some - times you breathe red

S2 *mf*
some - times, you breathe, you breathe — some - times you breathe red

A1 *mf*
— some - times, you breathe, — some-times you breathe red

A2 *mf*
— some - times, you breathe, — some-times you breathe red

39 *f*

S1 pop - pies — o - ver the hills in Pal - es - tine,

S2 pop - pies — o - ver the hills in Pal - es - tine,

A1 pop - pies — o - ver the hills in Pal - es - tine,

A2 pop - pies — Ov - er the hills, red pop - pies

ten. *f*

43 *mf*

S1 ov - er the hills in Pal - es - tine, and I see girls with or - chards of

S2 ov - er the hills in Pal - es - tine, and I see girls with or - chards of

A1 ov - er the hills in Pal - es - tine, and I see girls with or - chards of

A2 ov - er the hills in Pal - es - tine, and I see girls with or - chards of

mf

47

S1 al-monds in their eyes, girls with or - chards of

S2 al-monds in their eyes, in their eyes, or - chards of al - monds, girls with

A1 al-monds in their eyes, in their eyes, girls with or - chards of

A2 al-monds in their eyes, in their eyes, girls with or - chards of

51

meno moso mp

S1 alm - onds in their eyes, and old men stroll - ing

mp *meno moso*
G# = Ab

S2 al - monds in their eyes, in their eyes, their

mp *meno moso*
D# = Eb

A1 al - monds in their eyes, in their eyes. their

mp *meno moso*
C# = Db

A2 al - monda in their eyes, in their eyes, their

meno moso

54

S1 *p* *a tempo mp*
 si - lent - ly a - mong burned vil - lag - es. And I can't

S2 *p* *a tempo mp*
 eyes, a - mong burned vil - liag - es. And I can't

A1 *p* *a tempo mp*
 eyes a - mong burned vil - lag - es. And I can't

A2 *p* *a tempo mp*
 eyes, a - mong burned vil - ag - es. And I can't

57

S1
 say how I love my peo - ple, and I can't tell my love how to

S2
 say how I love my peo - ple, and I can't tell my love how to

A1
 say how I love my peo - ple, and I can't tell my love how to

A2
 say how I love my peo - ple, can't tell how

First sopranis divide

60

S1 *mf*
leave our land without weep-ing, I can't al-ways love this

S1 *mf*
leave our land without weep-ing, and I can't al-ways love this land, and I can't

S2 *mf*
leave our land without weep-ing, and I can't al - ways love,

A1 *mf*
leave our land without weep-ing, and I can't al - ways love, I can't

A2 *mf*
— with - out weep-ing, and I can't al - ways love

60

64

S1
land, I can't al-ways love this land, this *rit.*

S1
al-ways love this land, this_ land, this *rit.*

S2
al - ways love, I can't al-ways love, I can't al-ways love this *rit.*

A1
al - ways love, I can't al-ways love, I can't al-ways love this *rit.*

A2
al - ways love land this *rit.*

64

rit.

One soprano
sings top note.

68

S1
land.

S1
land.

S2
land. *p* The call to prayer at five a. m. spreads my

A1
land. *p* The call to prayer at five a. m. spreads my

A2
land, *p* The call to prayer at five a. m. spreads my

68

72 *rit. al fine*

S1
the scars

S2
rit. al fine
fing - ers ov - er the scars

A1
rit. al fine
fing - ers ov - er the scars

A2
rit. al fine
fing - ers ov - er the scars

72 *rit. al fine*