

NAXOS

**Reza
VALI**

The Being of Love

Janna Baty, Mezzo-soprano

**Württembergische
Philharmonie
Reutlingen**

Fawzi Haimor



Reza Vali (b. 1952)

The Being of Love

*The being of love,
is separate from any existence.
Love is the mystery
of God's creation.*

The above quatrain is Iranian-American composer Reza Vali's translation from Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī, a 13th-century Persian poet and Sufi mystic who is as significant to the literature of the Middle East as Li Po and Tu Fu are to China or William Shakespeare is to the English-speaking world. It is from one of the poems Vali has set in a 2005 song cycle for mezzo-soprano and orchestra featured on this album, which takes its title from the first line, as does this latest release of Vali's music, the ninth devoted exclusively to his work and his second for Naxos' 21st Century Classics series. In addition to *The Being of Love*, two orchestral works without voice are also included: *Ravân*, a dazzling 2013 concert opener; and *Isfahan*, composed four years later, which to date is the weightiest instalment in his ongoing series of 'Calligraphy' compositions based on the forms, rhythms, and modes of the Iran's classical Dastgâh-Maqâm system.

The three works featured on the present recording all postdate the musical epiphanies that led to Reza Vali's current compositional approach. Although Vali was born in Ghazvin (Qazvin), Iran, a city which served as the capital of the extremely influential Safavid dynasty in the 16th century, he was strangely disconnected from the musical traditions of his homeland. This was because of his studies at the Tehran Conservatory of Music (in Iran's current capital), where European music had been overemphasised and Persian traditional music was disparaged. In his book *Return to the Origins*, Vali recounts that his Eurocentric music teachers claimed Iranian music was 'out of tune' and that listening to it would 'corrupt the ear.' Students who attempted to learn more about their musical heritage 'were actually punished.' Nevertheless, he began collecting folk songs quietly 'out of a growing passion' but then, as a teenager, he moved to Vienna for further study, where he became immersed in the world of European high modernism.

It was only after he moved to the United States, settling in Pittsburgh in 1978, that he began to realise there were many possible contemporary compositional paths. That same year, he composed the first of his sets of *Folk Songs*, a four-song cycle combining simple folk melodies in the voice with an atonal piano accompaniment. He has gone on to compose 18 such sets thus far, for voice and various accompaniments (some for full orchestra) as well as purely instrumental compositions for small and large forces. Some of these works use material directly from actual Persian folk songs whereas others are simply suggestive of them. The more of these he composed, the more his music grew away from atonality and toward a new kind of modal tonality derived from the Iranian Dastgâh-Maqâm system, which Vali rediscovered through his study of Iranian folk music.

The Dastgâh-Maqâm system uses a 17-tone unequal scale combining a cycle of purely tuned perfect fifths with several smaller intervals which are also based on pure ratios. While the West's 12-tone equal tempered tuning closely approximates purely tuned fifths, the cycles gradually diverge, plus the smaller intervals have no parallels at all. Vali started off approximating the smaller intervals through equally tempered quartertones, then eighth tones, which captured their spirit but with limited nuance. Finally, in the year 2000, he abandoned the European system altogether and devised his own idiosyncratic 'mixed tuning' system which, in order to facilitate performance by trained musicians from around the world, can use the 12-tone equal tempered cycle of perfect fifths but additionally includes more precisely rendered smaller intervals. This new system, which is relatively easy for musicians to learn even though it can have up to 35 distinct pitches per octave, has been the basis for most of the music he has composed since then, which also eschews conventional Western counterpoint and musical forms and instead explores forms inherited from the Iranian Dastgâh-Maqâm modal system, such as call and response types of polyphony as well as various kinds of elaborations of musical phrases, rather than motivic development. Vali has explained that up until around the 16th century, Western and Middle Eastern musical traditions were much more closely related. Their separate evolution led to many sonic paths that had never previously been taken, which is what makes Vali's music simultaneously sound very traditional and completely brand new.

Ravân opens quietly with just a low pitched large shaker ushering in a driving ostinato scored for alto flute, clarinet, muted trombone and violas, which morphs into a mostly unison whirling melody. Other instruments gradually join in (cellos, English horn, trumpet, oboe, violins), weaving cascades of motivic shards, culminating in the full orchestra playing before being seemingly silenced by a dramatic percussive frenzy in the bass drum and tom toms just a minute in. It all starts up again only to dissolve a minute later into another percussion outburst, this time initiated by bongos. Piccolo and clarinets then enter with a

new syncopated melody introducing various microtonal intervals. They're later joined by English horn and bassoons before being eventually interrupted by a sequence of brass blades followed by a turbulent angular outburst in the strings which the rest of the orchestra joins. The original whirling melody reappears, building in intensity, and then dissolving into a final percussive assault. According to Vali's programme notes, '*ravân*', the Persian word for 'flowing', is derived from the word '*ravar*' which is very similar to the English word 'river'. The piece, written to celebrate the 75th birthday of the much-loved Pittsburgh composer David Stock (1939–2015), was inspired by the rivers around Pittsburgh. Vali's favourite of them is the wild and turbulent Youghiogheny, which really comes across in this music.

The Being of Love (Folk Songs, Set No. 16) is an extremely moving cycle of five songs based on folk lyrics and a poem by Rūmī as well as original words by Vali himself. According to Vali, the five songs evoke different aspects of love. In the first one, expressing longing, the mezzo-soprano begins singing from the first beat of the very first bar. The vocal line and its very closely parallel orchestral accompaniment are almost *verismo* in their chromaticism and intensity. The frenetic second song, describing an intoxicating lovers meeting, begins with an extravagant syncopated instrumental flourish that is tonally ambiguous. This material returns again at the end, but much more mysteriously. The third song is a dialogue between a deceased beloved and a grieving lover. An ascending three-note motif recurs throughout in various instrumental combinations supporting a lavish melismatic vocal line. The folk song text for the fourth song is extremely worldly – a woman lusciously rejects a man's unwanted advances. Yet it elicits Vali's most otherworldly music of the cycle, contrasting the sensual with the spiritual. The music also contains references to Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde* and Messiaen's *Quartet for the End of Time* as well as the Christmas carol *Silent Night*. The final poem of the set, which is by Rūmī and contains the passage quoted at the onset of these notes, inspired Vali to create the longest movement of the cycle; it is longer than the first three movements combined. Here the sensual and spiritual completely merge. The vocal line is packed with ecstatic repetitions whose key elements are echoed throughout the orchestra in descending phrases. The orchestration is the mostly highly charged of the entire cycle and the rhythms evoke Brazilian samba. A real standout moment is a brash timpani solo about midway through. Curiously, though the inspiration for this cycle is arguably the most overtly Persian of all the music presented here, Vali limits himself to Western 12-tone equal temperament throughout. He nevertheless manages to capture the essence of these words in the Persian language in a transcendent work worthy of a place alongside other great folk song inspired female voice and orchestra repertoire such as Manuel de Falla's *El amor brujo* and Joseph Canteloube's *Chants d'Auvergne*.

Vali's abstract instrumental *Isfahan (Calligraphy No. 16)*, on the other hand, is among his most deeply microtonal works. In the opening high-pitched cello solo, which calls to mind the sonorities of the traditional Iranian *kamancheh*, a pitch nearly halfway between E and E flat is introduced in the second bar as part of a descending tetrachord. *Isfahan* is one of the classical Persian modes and is constructed from two tetrachords built around G as the tonic, one ascending and one descending; the penultimate pitch in the descending tetrachord is that microtone. These two tetrachords serve as the basis of motifs which, according to Vali, undergo 'a series of permutations, modulations, and expansions' in accordance with traditional Persian musical forms, and also emphasise immediately identifiable Persian rhythmic phrases. It is particularly exciting to hear the brass instruments venture beyond 12-tone equal temperament and to hear rhythms traditionally performed by a soloist or a small group played by so many people.

The Rūmī poem quoted at the onset of these programme notes goes on to explain that 'through love, the soul of the earth reached the depth of the universe' and that 'mountains arose, moving to an ecstatic celestial dance' Vali has erected sonic mountains by expanding the vocabulary of Persian traditional music through deft use of Western orchestration in these works, which were all originally commissioned and premiered by his adopted hometown's Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, and are here presented in definitive performances by the Württembergische Philharmonie Reutlingen. But despite the large number of people playing, these multicultural syntheses are extremely nimble and are indeed ecstatic celestial dances.

Frank J. Oteri

New York City-based composer and journalist Frank J. Oteri is assistant professor of musicology at The New School, and is the vice president of the International Society for Contemporary Music (ISCM).

Many thanks and all my love to my wife Nan for her unwavering support of my music.

Many thanks to maestro Manfred Honeck and all colleagues of the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra for commissioning and first performing the orchestral works recorded on this album. – Reza Vali

The Being of Love (Folk Songs, Set No. 16)

2 No. 1. Entezâr

Mán dár entezâreh to hástám
mán bi ghárâreh to hástám
ey jáne sheerin
ey to nâzânin
mán khânehzâreh to hástám
hár roozo hár shâb bee khâbo ghârâr
dár entezâreh to hástám.

Reza Vali (b. 1952)

3 No. 2. Mástom Mástom

Yek golee gooshey tchámán
tâzeh shekofteh
ná dástom besh meereseh
ná khosh meeyofteh
mástom mástom
teeghet boreedeh dástom.
beeyâ berim shâhe tcherâgh
áhdee be bandeem
hár ke see áhd beshkáneh
kámár ná bândeem
mástom mástom
teeghet boreedeh dástom.

Traditional

4 No. 3. Sogvâreh

'Be mán goftee
ke del dáryâ nehmeeshe
ke hár delee be dáryâ
râh nemeeshe
delom dáryâ shodo
ghátreh shodo rood
ke âkhár
ghátreh râhe dáryâ meeshe.'

2 No. 1. Longing

I am waiting for you.
I am longing for you.
My dearest,
sweeter than life.
I am devastated by your love.
Every day and night,
without sleep, without patience,
I am waiting for your return.

3 No. 2. Love Drunk

A flower has bloomed on a tree.
I cannot reach it,
and it does not fall by itself.
I am love drunk.
Your thorn has torn my hand.
Let's go to the Shâh-e-çerâgh*,
and make a promise of love.
We will not be engaged,
if we break this promise.
I am love drunk.
Your thorn has torn my hand.

4 No. 3. In Memory of a Lost Beloved

'You told me that the soul
does not become an ocean,
and not every soul
can reach the ocean.
My soul became the drop,
became the river,
became the ocean.
Because the destiny of a drop
is the ocean.'

‘Ázeeze jâne mán
boodee yo ráftee
ke yâre mehrábâne mán
boodee yo ráftee
mán mândámo ghámee
sángen tcho yek kooh
ke to deldáre mán
boodee yo ráftee
mehrábân yâre mán
boodee yo ráftee.’

Reza Vali

5 No. 4. Dokhtár Shirâzi

‘Dokhtár Shirâzi joomom
dokhtár Shirâzi
lábâto bezâr roo lábâm
tâ shâvom râzi’
‘lábâmo meekhây tchekonee
bee háyâ pesár
ásál too bâzâr ná deedee
eenám mesle ooneh
váleekán nerkhesh gerooneh
sob beeyâ
shab neestám khooneh.’

Traditional

6 No. 5. Mehr bood

Lábe to bár lábe máneh
dáse to bár dáse mán
mehree jávedâneh
mehree ábádee
mehree áz ázál
mehree tâ ábád
mehree por áz sáfâ
bâ váfâ jávedân
mehree ke bâghee bemânád
mehre ábádee
jávedân bâghee bemânád
mehre mán vá to.

‘You were the love of my life,
and you have left.
You were my dearest,
and you have left.
I am left behind
with a mountain of sorrow.
You were my sweet companion,
and you have left.’

5 No. 4. The Girl from Shiraz

‘The girl from Shiraz**,
put your lips on my lips,
until I am satisfied.’
‘For what do you need my lips,
you shameless man?
These lips are sweet as honey,
but they have a high price.
Come to me in the morning,
because at night
I will not be home.’

6 No. 5. The Being of Love

Your lips on my lips,
your hand in my hand,
pure love,
eternal love,
from the beginning
to the end of time.
The being of love,
is separate from any existence.
Love is the mystery
of God’s creation.

Elláte eshgh áz háme ellát jodâst
eshgh ostorlâbe âsrâre khodâst
jesme khâk áz eshgh bár áflâk shod
koo koooh dâr rághs âmádo tchâlâk
koooh dâr rághs âmádo tchâlâk shod.

Rumi (1207–1273)

Through love,
the soul of the earth
reached the depth of the universe.
Mountains arose,
moving to an ecstatic, celestial dance.

* Shâh-e-çerâgh is a mosque in Shiraz.

** Shiraz is a city in central Iran,
located close to the ruins of Persepolis.

English translations by Reza Vali

Reza Vali



Photo: Michael Reed

Reza Vali was born in Ghazvin, Iran, in 1952. He studied at the Tehran Conservatory of Music, the University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna and the University of Pittsburgh. He has been a faculty member at the Carnegie Mellon School of Music since 1988. Vali's orchestral compositions have been performed in the United States by the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, Seattle Symphony, Boston Modern Orchestra Project, Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, Memphis Symphony Orchestra and Orchestra 2001. His chamber works have received performances by the Pittsburgh New Music Ensemble, Carpe Diem String Quartet, Del Sol Quartet, Kronos Quartet, Seattle Chamber Players and the Da Capo Chamber Players. Vali's music has been performed in Europe, China, Chile, Mexico, Hong Kong and Australia, and has been recorded on the Deutsche Grammophon, Naxos, New Albion, MMC, Ambassador, Albany and ABC Classics labels. www.rezavali.com

Janna Baty



Photo: Jeffrey Hornstein

Mezzo-soprano Janna Baty has sung with numerous international opera companies and orchestras including the Hamburgische Staatsoper, Boston Lyric Opera, Boston Symphony Orchestra, Los Angeles Philharmonic, Orchestre National du Capitole de Toulouse, Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra and Orquesta Filarmónica de Bogotá, among many others. She specialises in recently written works, and has collaborated with scores of composers, chamber ensembles, opera companies and conductors to bring new works to life. She has been honoured to record many of Reza Vali's works for voice and orchestra or chamber ensemble, appearing on *Vali: Flute Concerto / Deylaman / Folk Songs Set No. 10* (Naxos 8.557224), and *Toward That Endless Plain* (BMOP/sound), on which she sings *Folk Songs: Sets No. 8 and No. 14*. She has performed these extraordinary works with orchestras and chamber groups across the United States. Since 2008, Baty has been on the voice faculty of the Yale School of Music. She was born in Boston and lives in Hamden, Connecticut. www.jannabatymezzo.com

Württembergische Philharmonie Reutlingen



Founded in 1945, the Württembergische Philharmonie Reutlingen (WPR) is an internationally acclaimed symphony orchestra. Alongside serving its local region – where it reaches diverse and new audiences through its vibrant and imaginative programming and innovative spirit – the WPR regularly appears on the world stage at prestigious venues and festivals such as the Philharmonie Berlin, Tonhalle Zürich, Amsterdam Concertgebouw, Ravello Festival and the Gustav Mahler Music Weeks at Dobbiaco. The orchestra has performed with artists such as Lang Lang, Sabine Meyer and Frank Peter Zimmermann, as well as with musicians from other genres such as jazz, Latin, chanson and pop as part of its *Kaleidsokope* series. Outreach is an integral part of the WPR, with ventures including a concert series for people with dementia; FUGATO, an intercultural project involving refugees; NETZ-WERK-ORCHESTER, the orchestra's award-winning interactive live streaming format; and numerous annual concerts for families and children. The WPR's artistic work has been documented by a variety of albums and radio productions, which include several world premiere recordings. The orchestra has been led by French principal conductor Ariane Matiakh since the 2022/23 season. www.wuerttembergische-philharmonie.de

Fawzi Haimor



American conductor Fawzi Haimor's international career has seen him leading distinguished orchestras throughout the US and around the world, including the National Symphony Orchestra, Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra, BBC Symphony Orchestra and BBC Philharmonic, as well as the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, for which he served as assistant conductor and resident conductor for three years. Haimor served as music director of the Württembergische Philharmonie Reutlingen (WPR) from 2017 to 2020, conducting the WPR in its home at the Stadthalle Reutlingen, as well as on tours throughout Germany and Europe. Additionally, Haimor and the WPR recorded three albums for cpo. Haimor's extensive credits include conducting eloquent performances given by the Orchestre Philharmonique du Luxembourg, Orchestre de Chambre de Paris, NDR Radiophilharmonie Hannover, Deutsche Radiophilharmonie Saarbrücken Kaiserslautern, Orquestra Sinfónica do Porto Casa da Música, New Zealand Symphony Orchestra, Orchestra Sinfonica di Milano Giuseppe Verdi, Odense Symphony Orchestra, Kyoto Symphony Orchestra and the Qatar Philharmonic Orchestra, among others. www.fawzihaimor.com

Award-winning composer Reza Vali is a native of Iran but is now based in the United States after studies in Europe. Vali's distinctive cross-cultural style is founded in a quiet rebellion that saw him return to his Persian musical heritage. Following the dazzling concert opener *Ravân*, Vali has taken a text by 13th-century poet and mystic, Rūmī, two traditional texts, and words by Vali himself, to create the moving cycle *The Being of Love*, with each song evoking a different aspect of love. *Isfahan* uses Persian modes and forms, and is among Vali's most striking microtonal works, pushing the orchestra beyond its usual twelve-note sound-world in an exciting way.



Reza
VALI
(b. 1952)

- | | | |
|---|--|-------|
| 1 | Ravân (2013) | 7:04 |
| | The Being of Love (Folk Songs, Set No. 16) (2005)
Texts: Reza Vali 2 4, Traditional 3 5, Rūmī (1207–1273) 6
(Sung in Persian) (Translations: R. Vali) | 24:08 |
| 2 | No. 1. Entezâr ('Longing') | 2:40 |
| 3 | No. 2. Mástom Mástom ('Love Drunk') | 2:03 |
| 4 | No. 3. Sogvâreh ('In Memory of a Lost Beloved') | 4:04 |
| 5 | No. 4. Dokhtâr Shirâzi ('The Girl from Shiraz') | 5:37 |
| 6 | No. 5. Mehr bood ('The Being of Love') | 9:44 |
| 7 | Calligraphy No. 16 'Isfahan' (2017) | 23:12 |

WORLD PREMIERE RECORDINGS

Janna Baty, Mezzo-soprano 2–6

Württembergische Philharmonie Reutlingen

(Cornelius Grube, Director)

Fawzi Haimor

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