

A FEAST OF POETRY, MUSIC, STORY, MOVEMENT AND SPOKEN WORD

IN HONOR OF
COLEMAN BARKS

RENOWNED POET & TRANSLATOR OF RUMI

*FEATURING BARKS' MYSTICAL
LANDSCAPE OF POETRY BY*

**RUMI
&
LALLA**

"VIBRANT & DEEPLY
MOVING"

**LOVE
IN THE
MIDST**

A LIVING PRAYER

~A PERFORMANCE BY MYSTIC CONSORTIUM~

ZULEIKHA - STORYDANCER • EUGENE FRIESEN - CELLO • GLEN VELEZ - WORLD PERCUSSION
• PARISA SOULTANI - SPOKEN WORD • BENJY WERTHEIMER -ESRAJ



LOVE IN THE MIDST

A stunning evening of exquisite collaboration—unique global artistry. Depth of cello, haunting ancient metallic sound of the bowed Indian esraj, movement expression through story and spoken word, a plethora of rhythmic counterpoint in world percussion, the melodious voice of language, and visual landscape imagery.

Dynamic poetry of the mystic, RUMI, translated by renowned poet, COLEMAN BARKS, who also gave us the Kashmiri poetess, LALLA.

Opens Your Heart...

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THE WHY

LOVE IN THE MIDST -A LIVING PRAYER

Brings together the elements of beauty and inspiration through sound, movement, spoken word, visual landscape artistry and humor. Touching the heart of humanity. Remembering *the oneness of life itself*.

LOVE IN THE MIDST

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SUMMARY

A magnificent evening of poetry, music, dance, humor, creative artistry and story, *Love in the Midst* brings to life the heart of what it is to be fully human and divine.

Extraordinary musicians and storydancer create conversations in rhythms, melody and spoken word. Audiences are delighted and surprised at the artistry that spans genres of East and West. *Love in the Midst* reminds us that we can live within the heart of the Love. As the evening closes, the audience is invited to join the performers of the Consortium singing an original song of Rumi's poetry as a heartfelt gift to share.

SYNOPSIS

Love in the Midst opens in a deep blue projection of Earth in space with the voice of the late, Coleman Barks reciting Rumi's poem, "This we have now is not imagination..."

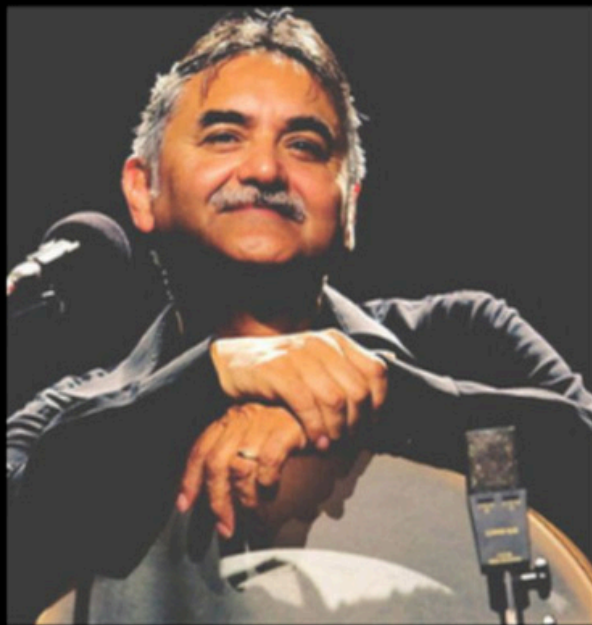
Light rises, Zuleikha, with musicians, begins the storydance of Love in the midst of chaos, where Mother Nature instructs us to feed each other so that harmony and kindness walk the earth always. The journey travels on to the story of Rumi by Parisa Soultani, flowing into the music of the Indian esraj by Benjy Wertheimer, and introducing the story and poetry of the Kashmiri mystic poetess, Lalla, recited by Barks' voice, spoken and danced by Zuleikha, with original music by Glen Velez on frame drums and cellist, Eugene Friesen.

Artistic landscapes carry the performance by the artists of Mystic Consortium into ancient stories and poetry, punctuated by electrifying music solos by these virtuoso artists and ecstatic singing by Parisa. Zuleikha brings the tapestry to a close with mesmerizing whirling against a moving starry night sky. After accolades, Zuleikha leads audience in singing an original, stirring Rumi poem, accompanied by the artists.

From the midst of chaos to Love...

THE PERFORMERS

MYSTIC CONSORTIUM ARTISTS



MYSTIC CONSORTIUM - THE DYNAMIC GROUP of innovative artists spanning the genres of music, dance, story, spoken word and percussion. LOVE IN THE MIDST with Mystic Consortium was launched in 2025 to sold out performances and rave reviews. This vibrant performance showcases the group's capacity for shared inspirational feeling through collaboration and creativity—Mystic Consortium performing LOVE IN THE MIDST.

- ZULEIKHA - STORYDANCE
- EUGENE FRIESEN - CELLO
- GLEN VELEZ - WORLD PERCUSSION
- PARISA SOULTANI - SPOKEN WORD
- BENJY WERTHEIMER - ESRAJ



ZULEIKHA / STORYDANCER

Zuleikha, international movement artist, Storydancer, and educator, has trained in movement, music, and mysticism by master teachers of eastern and western lineages, including Anna Halprin, Ustad Ali Akbar Khan, Ustad Hashim Chishti, and others.

In performance, Zuleikha has been described as "a singular figure on the horizon of sacred theater and dance" (Edinburgh Guide, Edinburgh Fringe Festival). A whirlwind of spirit, rhythm, dance and story, Zuleikha uplifts theater audiences with her very funny, soul-stirring performances.

Zuleikha has collaborated with many great musicians and poets, some of whom include the late African drum master Baba Olatungi, cellist David Darling, composer/pianist William Allaudin Mathieu, kirtan singers and composers Jai Uttal and Krishna Das, and avante garde composer/pianist Terry Riley, among many. Most recently, Zuleikha has collaborated with renowned poet and translator of Rumi's poetry, the late Coleman Barks, across America, often with the award winning musicians, Eugene Friesen, composer/cellist, and Glen Velez, world percussionist.

Her soul-stirring performances weave together stories and myths of world cultures in praise of Life. She has composed many songs based on the poetry of mystics. zuleikha.com

THE PERFORMERS



EUGENE FRIESEN

Four-time Grammy Award-winner Eugene Friesen is active internationally as a cellist, composer, conductor and teacher. His unique original repertoire and improvisational style has been featured in concerts internationally with the Paul Winter Consort, and with Trio Globo (Howard Levy, Glen Velez and Friesen). Recently returned from a one-year tour with Paul Simon, Eugene's improvised music has been featured in concerts all over the world. eugenefriesenmusic.com



LOVE IN THE MIDST

GLEN VELEZ

Four Time Grammy Award Winner, Glen Velez is the founding Father of the modern frame drum movement and is regarded as a legendary figure among musicians and audiences world-wide. His collaborations include Steve Reich, the Paul Winter Consort, Suzanne Vega, Maya Beiser, Tan Dun, Pat Metheny, Eddie Daniels, Richard Stoltzman, Zakir Hussain, David Darling, Howard Levy, Eugene Friesen and Coleman Barks. His signature sounds can be heard on numerous films, commercials and modern dance scores. glenvelez.com

PARISA SOULTANY

Parisa Soutani is an Iranian-American filmmaker and presenter who has worked on numerous documentary films and TV/web programs. The general area of her academic interest in humanities, philosophy, and literature with a focus on Rumi and Islamic humanism. Parisa is known for her film productions of “One Through Love: A Gathering of Lovers, Rumi and the Sufi Path of Love” and Earth Wisdom for a World Crisis. cemproductions.org/meet-team, independent.academia.edu/ParisaSoutani



BENJY WERTHEIMER

Benjy Wertheimer is an award-winning musician, composer, vocalist, producer and multi-instrumentalist, equally accomplished on tabla, congas, percussion, esraj, guitar and keyboards. He has performed and recorded with such artists as Krishna Das, Deva Premal and Miten, Jai Uttal, Walter Becker of Steely Dan, virtuoso guitarist Michael Mandrell, tabla master Zakir Hussain, and renowned bamboo flute master G. S. Sachdev. shantalamusic.com

LOVE IN THE MIDST



THE PERFORMERS

COLEMAN BARKS - THE POET



Coleman Barks (April 23, 1937 – February 23, 2026) was one of the nation's most celebrated poets and translators of the teachings of 13th Century Persian poet, theologian, and philosopher, Jelaluddin Rumi. Barks' books on Rumi, including the best-selling *Essential Rumi*, have sold more than half a million copies worldwide, and earned Barks a 2006 honorary doctorate degree from the University of Tehran in the field of Persian language and literature.

Barks also interpreted and published the poetry of the 14th-century Kashmiri poet, Lalla . Barks taught literature at the University of Georgia for three decades and was inducted into the Georgia Writers' Hall of Fame. He also published several collections of his own poetry. For over 25 years, he performed The Rumi Concert with Zuleikha and world performing artists including Glen Velez, Eugene Friesen, David Darling, Jai Uttal and poet Robert Bly. In 2022, Coleman Barks granted Zuleikha the use of his translations of Lalla's poetry for performance, et al, in perpetuity. colemanbarks.com, rumiconcert.com

RUMI

“Through Love,
thorns become flowers.
Through Love,
vinegar turns to wine.”
—Rumi



RUMI | Jelaluddin Rumi, popularly known as Rumi, was 13th a century mystic Sufi poet. Born in present day Afghanistan, he was a scholar, jurist and an Islamic theologian. His transformative encounter with the great dervish, Shams-i Tabriz, ignited his profound mystical poetry, exploring the Heart of Love. The poems and writings of Rumi have crossed borders to influence people worldwide. Rumi, whose poetry has been beloved in the East, now has become one of the world's most popular poets in the West. Like other mystic and Sufi poets of Persian literature, Rumi's poetry speaks of love which infuses the world.

LALLA

“...don't worry! What
must come, comes.
Face everything
with Love...
—Lalla



LALLA | Lalla, the 14th Century North Indian mystic, is a lioness. She rides the breath, and she knows the way of courage. Her attention is focused in these poems not through any cultural, or conventionally religious lens. Lalla's naked awareness is the truth she knows, and that is always in motion, as she herself was, wandering and singing these songs in medieval Kashmir. Lalla, or Laleshwari, was a pivotal figure in Kashmiri literature and spirituality, known for her simple yet profound Vakhs (quatrains) that blend Kashmiri Shaivism and Sufi ideas, emphasizing inner spiritual realization over external rituals, and forming the basis of the Kashmiri language's literary tradition.

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VISUALS LOVE IN THE MIDST



LOVE IN THE MIDST

FROM OUR AUDIENCE

THE TONE

- **The house was filled with radiant energy**
- **It connected me to so much beyond what we see in this physical world**
- **I was swimming in Beauty**
- **It gave me an anchor, as beyond anything I could have imagined**
- **Thank you for bringing Love into our world!**
- **The beauty, balance and love uplifted us**
- **Totally changed how I want to live my life!**
- **Simply beautiful. Divine mystery and love, love, Only Love**
- **Made me think about the environment of my Heart and the Planet**

PERFORMANCE



VIDEO EXCERPTS

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BEHIND THE PERFORMANCE



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LOVE IN THE MIDST



ZULEIKHA

Artistic & Creator Director

Through love of the poetry of Rumi and Lalla, and the performance of Storydance with world music, Zuleikha came to work with Coleman Barks. Together they joined with world musicians and brought this poetry to life through poetry, music, story, and movement, creating The Rumi Concert. Based on this work, Zuleikha has gathered some of these exceptional artists and others for LOVE IN THE MIDST.



CHARA NELSON

Video Backdrop Artist
Graphic Designer
Finance Manager

Chara Nelson, video and graphic designer, created the projected video designs of landscape artistry for Love in the Midst. As well as creating promotional materials, Chara oversees the budgetary and financial project accounting .

SUPPORT TEAM



RITA FABRIZIO

Production Manager
Communications

Rita Fabrizio oversees the details of production including travel, food and lodgings, as well as point person for the artists. Rita is a skilled writer, organizer and assistant.

THE STORYDANCER PROJECT

Presenter of LOVE IN THE MIDST

For many years, The Storydancer Project has presented The Rumi Concert, across the US in collaboration with Coleman Barks, Zuleikha, and inspiring world musicians. And now , The Storydancer Project presents Love in the Midst, inspired by Zuleikha, TSP Founder/Director, in collaboration with the artists of Mystic Consortium.

The Storydancer Project (TSP) is an international 501c3 non-profit organization based in Santa Fe, New Mexico. TSP inspires positive change in the face of adversity through transformative moment, performance, and self-care practices that restore vitality and cultivate joy.

www.thestorydancerproject.org

ZULEIKHA

FOUNDER / DIRECTOR OF THE STORYDANCER PROJECT/ TSP



Zuleikha created The Storydancer Project in 2005 to address the lack of wellness education internationally and locally, and to bring self-care and resiliency skills to girls, women, children, families, and communities. Zuleikha has taught and given trainings to nurses, doctors, psychologists, teachers and business leaders using her trademarked TAKE A MINUTE® resiliency program. Presenting work that integrates body/mind/spirit in the art of self-care, Zuleikha is the recipient of a number of humanitarian awards for infusing the art of dance with the gifts of healing, understanding and love of life, through her "outstanding work in the world promoting positive, personal, and social change"

thestorydancerproject.org

“ Really moving, caliber of artistry and heart was stunning... world class musicians.”

AUDIENCE REVIEWS

“ Last night was extraordinary, everyone was in altered space afterwards with such a love.”

“ Every person was magnificent, Zuleikha’s movements were beautiful—the night was magic.”

“ This was a jewel of a production, and the quality of the musicians individually was sky high—glad there were some solos—love that Bach Partita the cellist wove in. Zuleikha was absolutely stunning. all the costumes were perfect. The world needs more of this. And I wish they all could go on the road with this.”

“ Transcendant evening. the artists took the audience on a wonderful journey.”

“ Zuleikha’s sacred performance was magnificent. A beautiful being for bringing love into this world.”

“ Full of love and masterful collaboration of seriously talented artists. Coleman Barks was lovingly honored— with his recordings of Rumi and Lalla readings, while Zuleikha danced her glorious celebration to The Heart. Glen Velez, the master frame drum and voice was all heart and rhythm, Parisa Soultani a gorgeous woman with a voice I could listen to forever, speaking/singing Persian, while Benjy Wertheimer played an esraj—like a tiny Persian sitar—both tying us deeply to source. And finally, a cello player, Eugene Friesen, who beat out rhythms on his strings and made his cello hum, whine, sing. And the ending with the soft wind brushing over me from Zuleikha’s final twirl connecting heaven and earth. Tears...standing ovation.”

“ Fabulous performance! Everything was amazing- Zuleikha, Coleman's voice, Parisa's, musicians and video images. I love the end, inviting us to all sing! Powerful!”

BUDGET

THE TOTAL BUDGET FOR “LOVE IN THE MIDST” IS ESTIMATED AT \$50,000 PER CONCERT. THIS BUDGET WILL BE ALLOCATED ACROSS SEVERAL CATEGORIES TO ENSURE QUALITY PRODUCTION VALUES, MARKETING, AND DISTRIBUTION, WHILE ALLOWING FOR A PROFITABLE RETURN ON INVESTMENT (ROI).

HOW TO GET INVOLVED



LOVE IN THE MIDST

EXPERIENCE EXQUISITE COLLABORATION

between musicians, movement, spoken word, visual landscape,
uniquely dynamic global artistry, yet tender and deeply profound~

GIFT A PERFORMANCE with interwoven COMMUNITY SHARING

CREATE A *LOVE IN THE MIDST* EXPERIENCE

Host an event / performance

[SEE OUR VIDEO](#)

GET IN TOUCH TO EXPLORE WAYS

Love in The Midst can Serve Your Community

[BECOME A HOST](#)

CONTACT US

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THANK YOU!

