



Katayoun Goudarzi And Saffron Ensemble Stunningly Hypnotic 'Will You?'

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The close friendship of several culturally diverse musicians is captured on *Will You* (release date: **September 22, 2017** by Tames Records), the latest from Iranian-American vocalist Katayoun Goudarzi, master sitar player Shujaat Khan, highly respected saxophonist **Tim Ries** (who's played with jazz greats like **Jack DeJohnette** and Donald Byrd and rock icons like The Rolling Stones, Donald Fagen, and Rod Stewart), artful pianist Kevin Hays, and tabla player Dibyarka Chatterjee. Together, they have forged an unlikely ensemble that finds striking new settings for Rumi's centuries-old yet ever-urgent words.

"I come up with the skeleton of the tunes, but that's really just what we build out from," notes Khan. "We converse to make this music. It's never the same interpretation, the same sound, the same song twice." "The music is not classical Persian music," adds Goudarzi. "It's Persian classical poetry sung in Indian idioms, but with a touch of jazz. In that respect, it's perhaps different than things that have been done in the past."

Goudarzi is a perfectionist who pays meticulous attention to details. She's constantly experimenting in hopes of honoring the spirit and sense of the poetry she loves. "Don't"--a plea to save the beloved from arrest and torment--demanded a different vocal approach from Goudarzi. Goudarzi began her vocal career employing traditional recitation of Persian poetry, its sweeping spoken approach. For this album, she decided to return to singing, employing several different vocal styles to heighten the intensity, matched by Khan's supple, responsive playing.

"That poem was the reason I sang on this album. The lyrics are saying, he's my life, don't beat him up, don't take him away. I had to portray that pain," muses Goudarzi. "I had to sing those lyrics with all the passion it required. If I couldn't do it right, I wouldn't touch them. That was one of the inspiring songs that made me think of singing a lot of the album."



"With Rumi you can find all different kinds of poems, chronicling all different kinds of human experience," reflects Goudarzi. "Some are wildly romantic. Some are edgier like 'Don't.' Most of the verses we use on the album are love poems. The way I present the lyrics this time, on the title track, is to use three different poems to make sure I'm completing the story."

Her ensemble-mates expand the story by contributing pieces (Hays' "Sweet Caroline") and by weaving their instruments' voices into Goudarzi's. Sometimes they respond, as Khan does at the end of "Void," playing and humming the role of the beloved whom Rumi so often evokes in his poems. Sometimes they set the stage with a dramatic haunting and chilling solo as Ries does skillfully at the beginning of "Don't." Sometimes they stop playing entirely and allow Goudarzi to sing solo, heightening the emotional intensity, as at the end of the title track "Will You."

One of the defining qualities of Rumi's work is its sustained ability to resonate emotionally, across ages and across cultures. Goudarzi feels this resonance has particular relevance to our day and age. Through the words and music, she and the ensemble want to bring listeners deeper into these varied emotions, feelings universal in nature. "Happiness and sadness. Love and hatred. These are universal feelings, no matter what language we speak, the color of our skin. No matter how you express it, the feelings are the same. We wanted to bring those emotions to the surface."

In a context of heightened political tensions, when conversation and connection are being abandoned for harsher ways, Goudarzi points to the importance of connecting, of the small symbol the ensemble presents. "Isn't it something? A diverse group can create things a homogenous group can't," reflects Goudarzi. "Each of us interpreted these emotional musical phrases through all our experiences, all different, yet it all gels. **Perhaps** because at the end of the day, we're all human. It's important to remember that."