

Karim Al-Zand

Biography (long version)

The music of Canadian-American composer Karim Al-Zand (b.1970) has been called “strong and startlingly lovely” (Boston Globe). His compositions are wide-ranging, from settings of classical Arabic poetry to scores for dance and pieces for young audiences. His works explore connections between music and other arts, and draw inspiration from diverse sources such as 19th century graphic art, fables of the world, folksong and jazz. The themes of many of his pieces speak to his middle-eastern heritage as well. Al-Zand’s music has enjoyed success in the US, Canada and abroad and he is the recipient of several national awards, including the Sackler Composition Prize, the ArtSong Prize, the Louisville Orchestra Competition Prize and the “Arts and Letters Award in Music” from the American Academy of Arts and Letters. He holds degrees from Harvard and McGill Universities and is currently on the faculty of the Shepherd School of Music (Rice University) in Houston. Al-Zand is also a founding member of Musiq, Houston’s premiere contemporary music group, which presents concerts featuring new and classic repertoire of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. More information on Karim Al-Zand may be found at his website: www.alzand.com.

Performers of Al-Zand’s music include groups such as the American Modern Ensemble, the Flux Quartet, the Enso Quartet, North/South Consonance, Brave New Works, Pinotage, Ensemble Pi, the Beausejour Trio, the River Oaks Chamber Orchestra, the Louisville Orchestra and OrchestraX. He has been awarded three times in the Canadian SOCAN competition (for Fantasy and Fanfare, Sonata and String Quartet). His two string quartets have received awards and recognition from the 1997 Blodgett Composition Competition, the Salvatore Martirano Award, Harvard’s Bohemians Prize and the Tampa Bay Composers’ Forum Prize for Excellence in Chamber Music. While a fellow at the 2000 Oregon Bach Festival Composers’ Symposium, Al-Zand’s work Parizade and the Singing Tree was performed to critical acclaim.

Other awards include those from the American Modern Ensemble, Composer’s Guild, ASCAP, the Society of Composers, and the National Association of Composers. He has received fellowships from the June in Buffalo Festival, the Wellesley Composers Conference, the MusicNinetySeven Festival, and the MacDowell Colony. He has been commissioned through the Canada Council (Beausejour Trio), Houston Arts Alliance (River Oaks Chamber Orchestra), the Fromm Foundation, and ASCAP/SCI, and by ALEA III, OrchestraX and Ensemble Pi.

Al-Zand received his Bachelor of Music from McGill University, with majors in both music theory and composition. While there he studied composition with Donald Steven, John Rea and the late Bengt Hambraeus and worked in the McGill's Group of the Electronic Music Studio with Alcides Lanza. As a pianist he has studied under Eugene Plawutsky and Louis-Philippe Pelletier. At Harvard University he studied composition with Mario Davidovsky and Bernard Rands, and music theory with David Lewin.

While in Boston, Al-Zand worked periodically as a jazz musician, both as a pianist and directing for two years the Dudley House Big Band, a 17-piece jazz ensemble he formed at Harvard University in 1994. One of his several compositions for the ensemble, It’s About Time, was awarded in the 1996–1997 Massachusetts Association of Jazz Educators Composition Contest.

In his scholarly work, Al-Zand has pursued several diverse areas of music theory, including topics in jazz, counterpoint, and improvisation (both jazz and 18th century extemporization). He has also developed with Martin Shultz, an online ear training application, Hearing AID. His dissertation is entitled *Theoretical Observations on Jazz Improvisation: The Solos of Julian Cannonball Adderley*.