

Conversation on a Train

low voice, high voice, piano



Elizabeth Alexander

Seafarer Press

Conversation on a Train

Wouldn't it be just my luck that she'd be on this train,
Sitting by the only empty seat.
But between the rally and my walk here in the rain
I really had to get off of my feet. So here we are...

With a true and righteous pen the battle lines were drawn
God and country, women, children, rights, and sin,
You and I locked eyes across the crowded courthouse lawn:
The fight was on and you and I were in. So here we are...

We've been riding half an hour now, trying not to touch,
Well aware we've got no common ground.
But I'm just as tired of this silent, angry clutch
As of all the fury and the sound.
So here we are...

None of us expected such a downpour. Can we agree on that?
Not the weather we came into town for. Can we agree on that?
Here's a picture of my youngest boy, he just turned three last May,
Getting all dressed up in daddy's shoes and hat.
I wish every child could know such love and laughter.
Can we agree on that?

Everyone deserves a job that feeds them. Can we agree on that?
And a sense of right and wrong that leads them. Can we agree on that?
If you ask a dozen women why they wouldn't want a child,
And ten of them say, "Where's the money at?"
I suspect that's something both of us find troubling.
Yes, let's agree on that.

When the howling of the wolf drowns out every other voice,
The miracle of life brings little reason to rejoice.
Oh that ain't no kind of life,
and Lord have mercy that's no choice –
Can we agree that this is not how things should be?

Tearing down each other leads us nowhere. Can we agree on that?
And we both love life, so let's not go there. Yes, let's agree on that.
We can hem and haw and hammer, we can legislate and ban,
And fan the flames of this unholy spat,
Or for once we could be listening more than shouting...
So here we are. Yes, here we are.

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Composer Notes:

It took four years, multiple performances, a music theater workshop, a collaborative recording session, and many courageous conversations for me to figure out how to tell this story with grit, honesty, and compassion. I could never have done it without a great deal of help:

Singers of early drafts:

David Lohman

Susan Peck & Jolie Rocke

Cathy & Jane Crosby-Schmidt

Workshop development:

Nautilus Music Theater

Ben Krywosz, dramaturg

Elena Glass & Keri Rodau, singers

Jill Dawe, piano

Recording artists:

Elena Glass & Debi Kilde, singers

David Lohman, piano

To learn more about

Conversation on a Train visit:

[www.elizabethalexander.com/
works/conversation](http://www.elizabethalexander.com/works/conversation)



for all of us

Conversation on a Train

low voice, high voice, piano

(♩ = Somewhere around 88)

Words and Music by Elizabeth Alexander

The musical score is arranged in three systems. The first system includes two vocal staves (I and II) and a piano accompaniment. The piano part features a right-hand melody starting with a 'boldly' dynamic and a left-hand accompaniment that becomes 'murmuring'. The second system continues the piano accompaniment with a 'murmuring' right-hand part and a more active left-hand part. The third system shows the piano accompaniment with a 'murmuring' right-hand part and a left-hand part with a 'boldly' dynamic.

System 1: Chords: C(omit3), F(sus4), F, C. Dynamics: *mf* boldly, *murmuring*.

System 2: Chords: Cm, C7(omit3), F(sus4). Dynamics: *murmuring*.

System 3: Chords: C, C7(sus4). Dynamics: *boldly*.

This song is *the story of a conversation*.

Feel free to play with dynamics, vocal nuances, cutoffs, pedaling, etc. in order to tell this story well.

2

A

10

I

II

mp free rhythm, telling a story

Would-n't it be just my luck that she'd be on this train sit - ting by the on - ly emp - ty

C7(omit3) F(sus4) F C

mp

13

I

II

seat. But be-tween the ral - ly and my walk here in the rain I

F(sus4) F C(omit3) F(sus4) F

16

I

II

real-ly had_ to get off of my feet. So here we are.

C(omit3) F(sus4)

19 **C(omit3)** **F(sus4)** **F** **C(omit5)** **F(sus4)**

boldly

B

23 *mf free rhythm, telling a story*

I With a true and right-eous pen the bat-tle lines_ were drawn: God and coun-try, wo- men, chil- dren, rights and

II

C **F(sus4)** **F** **C7**

mf

26

I sin. You and I locked eyes a - cross the crowd-ed court-house lawn, the

II

F(sus4) **C(omit3)** **F(add9sus4)** **F**

Conversation on a Train (low voice, high voice, piano) - Vocal Score

4

29

I
 fight was on__ and you and I were in. So here we are.

II

Ab F(sus4) F

32

C(omit5) F(sus4) F C(omit3)

C

36

I
 try - ing not to touch,

II
 We've been rid - ing half an hour now, try - ing not to touch, Well a - ware we've got no com - mon

C(omit3)/G F(add9sus4)/G C(omit3)

mp

*

39

I
no com-mon ground,

II
ground. But I'm just as tir - ed of this si - lent, an - gry clutch as of

F(sus4)/C C(omit3) F(add9sus4)/C

42

I
the fu-ry and_ the sound. So here we are.

II
all of the fu-ry and_ the sound.

Ab(add9)/C C7(sus4) Abmaj7(add9)

mf

46

I
a deep breath *p*
So here we are.

II
mp *a deep breath* *p*
So here we are.

Fm7 Db7

mp *p*

meno mosso

D

Use the time during this instrumental transition to make the decision to break the silence.
 Do one or both parties look down, turn away, or glance in the direction of the other?
 Does they change the position of their body in some way?

a tempo

50

E_b D_b/E_b A_b/E_b E_b D_b/E_b $Bbm(add9)$

54

E_b D_b/E_b A_b/E_b

E

58

I

II

None of us ex - pec - ted such a down - pour. Can we a - gree on

E_b A_b Fm^7 $Bb(sus9)$

Opal Palmer Adisa, poet • Paul Adams, technological hero • Stephen Alexander, lyric consultant • Ginny Allen, Agile coach and friend • The great people at American Composers Forum • Yehuda Amichai, poet • A. R. Ammons, poet • Jennifer Anderson, conductor and composer advocate • Scott Bates, poet • Abbie Betinis, initiator of collaborative endeavors • Beth Norton, conductor and composer advocate • Dennis Blubaugh, more than just a music dealer • Michael deVernon Boblett, poet • Edna Busby, my first piano teacher • Ray Bradbury, writer • Augustin Cadena, translator • Norbert Capek, minister and advocate for religious freedom • Jessica Corbett, editor • David Cummings, poet • Philip Dacey, poet • Catherine Dalton, composer and scrum partner • Emily Dickinson, poet • Evelyn Dudley, poet and caregiver • Rob Eller-Isaacs, minister and composer advocate • Ralph Waldo Emerson, philosopher and poet • Louise Erdrich, writer • David Allan Evans, poet • Sophia Lyon Fahs, writer • Richard M. Fewkes, minister and writer • Pasha Gertler, poet • Jack Gallagher, composer and teacher • Paul Gerike, proofreader • Jocelyn Hagen and Michael Hagan, founders of Graphite Marketplace • Steve Harper, just about everything • Steve Harkins, web designer • Edie Hill, composer and friend • Langston Hughes, poet • Margaret and George Heald, piano technician • Karel Husa, composer and teacher • David Ignatow, poet • Kabir, mystic • Linda Kachelmeier, composer and scrum partner • Ruth Palmer, conductor and composer advocate • Joan Wolf Prefontaine, poet • Paul Rardin, conductor and composer advocate • Kalidasa, poet • Steve Kaul, recording engineer • Søren Kierkegaard, philosopher and poet • Dorothy Knost, piano teacher • Ben Krywosz, artistic director of Nautilus Music-Theater • Denise Levertov, poet • George Ella Lyon, poet • Jonathan Machen, vocalist • Dawna Markova, writer • Anne Matlack, conductor and composer advocate • Nancy Menk, composer advocate • Edna St. Vincent Millay, poet • Jane Ramseyer Miller, conductor, composer, social activist • Joe Mish, conductor and composer advocate • J. David Moore, composer • Gerald Rich, poet • Carl Sandburg, poet • friend • King Sigismund III, religious reformer • Ann Silsbee, composer, poet and friend • Simon Alexander-Adams, sounding board, fellow creative, and awesome son • Steven Stucky, composer and teacher • Rabindranath Tagore, poet • Sister Peronne Marie Thibert, teacher and writer • Oliver Alexander-Adams, unconventional thinker and light of my life • Howard Thurman, civil rights leader and writer • Everyone whose work supports the Association for Unitarian Universalist Music Ministries • Charles Varney, high school choral director • Anna Vonhuben, illustrator and graphic designer • Nancy White, poet • John Greenleaf Whittier, poet • Theodore Chickering Williams, poet • Daniel Winter, pianist and teacher • Nancy Wood, poet • Yehudi Wyner, composer and teacher

**A lot of hard work
and creativity went
into bringing this
music to you...**



**...and some of it
was even mine.**

**This page has been intentionally omitted.
(You know why.) A complete perusal score may be
purchased through any music store or dealer.**

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The Music of Elizabeth Alexander
www.seafarerpress.com

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8

70 *p*

I wish ev-'ry child could know such love and laugh - ter.

hat.

Bb(sus4) *Bb* *Eb* *Ab/Eb* *Eb* *Cm7*

73

Can we a - gree__ on that?

Ab9 *Bb(sus4)* *Eb*

F

75 *mp*

Ev-'ry-one de-serves a job that feeds them... Can we a - gree__ on

Eb *Ab* *Fm7* *Bb(sus9)*

78

I that?

II *mp* And a sense of right and wrong that leads them...

E_b *A_b*

81

I If you

II Can we a - gree_ on that?

F_m7 *B_b(sus9)* *E_b*

83

I ask a do - zen wom-en why they would-n't want a child and ten of them_ say: "Where's the mon-ey

II

C_m9 *G(sus4)/B_b* *A_bma₇* *E_b/G* *G_b*

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**...and some of it
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94

I
rea - son to re - jice. *mf* and Lord have

II
Oh that ain't no kind of life, -

Cm Ab Bb(sus4) Bb/Ab

96

I
mer - cy that's no choice. _____

II

Eb/G Ab

f

* Another sweet opportunity for 3-part divisi sopranos if that works for you. (Just don't give into the temptation to let the altos help out!)

99 **meno mosso**

I
p Can we a - gree_ that this is not how_ things_ should be? _____

II
p Can we a - gree_ that this is not how_ things_ should be? _____

F7(omit3) Eb/G Ab⁹

p

12

H

a tempo

102 *mp warmly*

I
Tear-ing down each oth - er leads us no - where... Can we a - gree_ on

II
Tear-ing down each oth - er leads us no - where... Can we a - gree_ on

mp warmly

E_b A_b Fm⁷ B_b(sus⁹)

105

I
that? And we both love life, so let's not go_____ there...

II
that? And we both love life, so let's not go_____ there...

mf

E_b A_b

108

I
Can we a - gree_ on that? We can

II
Can we a - gree_ on that? We can hem and haw and ham - mer,

Fm⁷ B_b(sus⁹) E_b Cm⁹ G(sus⁴)/B_b

111

I le - gis - late and ban, and fan the flames of this un - ho - ly spat. Or for

II and fan the flames of this un - ho - ly spat. Or for

Abmaj7 Eb/G Gb Bb

114

I once we could be lis - t'ning more than shout - ing. So here we

II once we could be lis - t'ning more than shout - ing.

free rhythm

Eb Ab/Eb Eb Cm7

116

I are. Yes, here we are.

II So here we are. Yes, here we are.

free rhythm

Ab Bb(sus4) Eb Ab Eb

Vocal Music by Elizabeth Alexander

A Garret of Old Playthings (Carl Sandburg)
high voice, piano

A Love Like That (Hafiz/Ladinsky)
low voice / medium voice / high voice, piano

Conversation on a Train (Elizabeth Alexander)
Duet: low voice & medium voice, piano

Die Gedanken Sind Frei (German protest song, arr. Alexander)
Duet: low voice & high voice / 2 medium voices, piano

Grace (Elizabeth Alexander)
low voice / medium voice / high voice, piano

I Write This Poem Out of Darkness (George Ella Lyon)
Trio: low, medium & high voices, flute, violin, piano

I'll Tell You a Story, then... (Nancy White)
low voice / medium voice / high voice, piano

Infant Holy, Infant Lowly (Polish carol, arr. Alexander)
Trio: low, medium & high voices *a cappella*

Jo! (The Edict of Torda)
Trio: low, medium & high voices *a cappella*

My Aunt Gives Me a Clarinet Lesson (Gregory Djanikian)
soprano, flute, clarinet, violin, cello, piano, percussion

No One Gets a Program (Dutch proverb, Elizabeth Alexander)
Duet: low voice & medium voice, piano

No Ordinary Song (Elizabeth Alexander)
medium voice, piano

Oath Taking (Opal Palmer Adisa)
high voice, piano

On the Edge of the Water (Elizabeth Alexander)
low voice, piano

Sleep Song (Ann Silsbee)
low voice / medium voice / high voice, piano

The Eternal One (Ralph Waldo Emerson)
low voice / medium voice / high voice, piano

The Gospel Isn't Written in the Bible Alone (Elizabeth Alexander)
low voice / medium- high voice, piano

Trouble in a Minnesota Town (Neal Bowers)
medium voice / high voice, piano

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