

Conversation on a Train

SA or SSAA, 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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Performance Notes:

Sopranos and altos should be visibly divided into two "camps," separated if possible by a few feet of physical space. Emotional distance may also be suggested by the body language of singers, who may at times look or turn away from the opposing side.

This arrangement may be sung as a 2-part song, a 4-part song, or a combination of the two. If performing as a 2-part song, singers should sing the upper notes unless otherwise indicated. Because the tessitura of the second sopranos is on the low side, you may wish to have some of them sing first alto, and vice versa. But do make sure all singers stand with the camp they are aligned with!

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. To learn more about *Conversation on a Train*, visit:

www.elizabethalexander.com/works/conversation



for all of us

Conversation on a Train

SA or SSAA, piano *

(♩ = Somewhere around 88)

Words and Music by Elizabeth Alexander

The musical score is arranged in three systems. The first system includes vocal staves for Soprano (S) and Alto (A), and a piano accompaniment (Pno) in 4/4 time. The piano part features a right-hand melody with a 'murmuring' texture and a left-hand accompaniment with 'boldly' dynamics. Chords are indicated as C(omit3), F(sus4), F, and C. The second system continues the piano accompaniment with a 'Cm' chord and a first-hand melody. The third system continues with a 'C' chord and a first-hand melody, with a 'C7(sus4)' chord indicated above the staff.

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This song is *the story of a conversation*. Feel free to play with dynamics, timings, cutoffs, pedaling, etc. in order to tell the story well.

Conversation on a Train (SA or SSAA, piano) - Choral Score

2

A

10

S

A *mp*

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

mp

C7(omit3) F(sus4) F C

13

S

A

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

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

16

S

A

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* *fiercely*

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

A

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

mf

26

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

A

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

4

29

S
fight was on___ and you and I___ were in.* So here we are.

A

Ab F(sus4) F

* Choirs singing this song in two parts may sing the high C in measure 30.
(That said, it's such a juicy moment it might be worth a *divisi* stretch.)

32

S

A

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

C

36

S
try - ing not to touch,

A
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

S no com-mon ground,

A 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

S the fu-ry and the sound. *mf* So here we are.

A all of the fu-ry and the sound, the fu-ry and the sound. *mf*

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

46

S *a deep breath* **meno mosso** *p*

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

Fm7 Db7

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 \flat Db/E \flat Ab/E \flat E \flat Db/E \flat B \flat m(add9)

54

E \flat Db/E \flat Ab/E \flat

E

58

S

A

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

E \flat Ab Fm⁷ B \flat (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.**

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8

70 *p*

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

A
hat.

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

73

S
Can we a - gree_ on that?

A

Ab9 *Bb*(sus4) *Eb*

F

75 *mp*

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

A

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

mp

78

S that?

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

E_b *A_b*

81

S If you

A Can we a - gree on that?

F_m⁷ *B_b(sus9)* *E_b*

83

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

A

C_m⁹ *G(sus4)/B_b* *A_bmaj7* *E_b/G* *G_b*

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94

S rea - son to re - joice. *mf* and Lord have

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

Cm *Ab* *Bb(sus4)* *Bb/Ab*

96

S mer - cy that's no choice.*

A

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!)

meno mosso

99

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

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

F7(omit3) *Eb/G* *Ab9*

p

H

102 *mp warmly*

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

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

mp warmly

E_b Ab Fm⁷ B_b(sus9)

105 *mf*

S that? And we both love life, so let's not go___ there...

A that? And we both love life, so let's not go___ there...

mf

E_b Ab

108

S Can we a - gree__ on that? We can

A 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

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

A and fan the flames_ of this un - ho - ly spat. Or for

p

p

Abmaj7 Eb/G Gb Bb

114

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

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

Eb Ab/Eb Eb Cm7

p

116

S are. Yes, here we are.

A So here we are. Yes, here we are.

Eb Ab Eb

Ab C Bb(sus4)

ped. *

Selected Choral Music by Elizabeth Alexander

- A Palette To Paint Us As We Are** (Gerald Rich)
SATB, piano • SSA, piano
- Beware the Winter Settlin' In** (Elizabeth Alexander)
SATB, Celtic band, opt. unison children's choir
- Blessed Be the Flower That Triumphs** (Michael Boblett)
SATB a cappella • SATB, orchestra
- Cherish Your Doubt** (Elizabeth Alexander)
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- Even a Fist Was Once an Open Palm** (Yehuda Amichai)
SATB a cappella
- Faith Is the bird that feels the light** (Rabindranath Tagore)
SSA a cappella • SATB a cappella
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SSATB, piano
- Folks, I'm Telling You** (Langston Hughes)
SSATB, piano
- Get Curious** (Elizabeth Alexander)
SSAA a cappella
- Glen Song** (Scott Bates)
SSATB, piano
- Grace** (Elizabeth Alexander)
SATB, piano • SSA, piano
- Handles** (Elizabeth Alexander)
SSA, piano
- How To Sing Like a Planet** (Elizabeth Alexander)
SATB, piano • TBB, piano
- If You Can Walk You Can Dance** (Zimbabwean Proverb)
SAB, piano, claves • TBB, piano, claves
SSA, piano, claves • SATB, piano, claves
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- Infant Holy, Infant Lowly** (Polish carol, arr.)
SSA a cappella
- Jump!** (Ray Bradbury)
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SATB, piano
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- ...or a musician** (Philip Dacey)
SATB, orchestra
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SATB, piano
- Reasons for the Perpetuation of Slavery** (Alexander)
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- Same Birds** (David Allen Evans)
SATB a cappella
- Sing Me Awake** (Gregory Orr)
SATB, piano, string quartet • SATB, piano, string orchestra
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- The Gate is Open** (Sister Peronne Marie Thibert)
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SSA, piano
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SSA a cappella • TBB a cappella
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SATB a cappella • TTBB a cappella
SSAA a cappella • SATB, flute
- Why I Pity the Woman Who Never Spills** (Joan Prefontaine)
SSAA a cappella

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