

English translation of 'The songs of Khayyám', another Shandiz Ensemble project. The songs are based on poems of the Iranian poet Omar Khayyám. The lyrics were translated from Persian by John O'Kane.

[1]

There was a drop of water; it joined the sea.
There was a speck of dust; it merged with the earth.
Your coming and going in the world amounts to what?
A fly appeared and then it was seen no more.

The heavenly sphere is a likeness of our worn-out frame.
The Oxus is only a trace from our filtered tears.
Hell is one ember from our futile suffering;
Paradise one moment of our soothing good fortune.

[2]

Here is the moment of dawn. Idol with sweet footsteps,
Now start to sing a song, bring out the wine!
Through this coming of spring and departing of winter
Thousands of emperors and kings have entered the earth.

Beware, do not reveal this hidden secret!
Every flower that withers away will never blossom again.

This palace that once rivalled the sphere of heaven,
At whose threshold kings prostrated themselves:
We saw a ring-dove perched on its walls.
He was cooing: "Now where? Now where? Now where?"

[3]

An old shaykh said to a prostitute: "You're drunk.
Every moment your foot is caught in another snare."
She replied: "Oh shaykh, what you say about me is true.
But what of you? Are you the man you seem to be?"

Oh issuer of fatwas, we are more effective than you.
In all our drunkenness, we have a clearer head than you.
You drink people's blood, we drink blood of the vine.
Tell the truth. Which of us is more blood-thirsty?

[4]

Oh wine-pourer, as for those who have gone before,
They lie in the earth of false hopes. Oh wine-pourer,
Go on! Drink wine and hear the truth from me.
Oh wine-pourer, everything they said was wind.

The moon's rays cut through night's robe with light.
Drink wine. You cannot find a happier time than this.
Be pleased and think about how long the moonlight
Will shine upon our graves in times to come.

[5]

How I wish there was some place to rest
Or that this long road would reach its end.
How I wish that after a hundred thousand years
Hope like a fresh plant would sprout from the earth.

With all our coming and going where is the profit?
In the warp of our existence where are the cross-threads?
In the sky's rotation so many men of purity
Burn and end up as dust. Where is the smoke?

[6]

Since there is no guarantee tomorrow will come,
Now make happy this distraught heart of yours.
Drink wine here in the moonlight, oh good-looking moon.
For one day the moon will search much and not find us.

[7]

From the crowd of all those who travelled this long road,
Where is one who has returned so I may question him?
Beware lest on this double road of passion and need
You leave something behind. You will not return again.

How long will I pile bricks upon the surface of the sea?
I'm fed up with the mosque and with the synagogue.
Khayyam, who said, "But then there will be Hell!"?
Who has been to Hell? Who has returned from Paradise?

[8]

On the cheek of the rose the spring breeze is a delight.
In plains and fields the heart-ravisher's face is a delight.
Whatever you say about bygone days is not a delight.
Be happy. Of yesterday say nothing. Today is a delight.

Whenever the violet dips its robe in coloured dye,
The light zephyr extends its hand to the rose's skirt.
Intelligent and clear-headed is the man who drinks wine
With a silver-breasted friend and breaks his cup on a stone.

[9]

When the springtime cloud washes the tulip's face,
Rise and straightway go find the wine cup.
For these green sprouts that today are your pleasure spot
Tomorrow will spring up from your grave.

Neither you nor I understand the mysteries of pre-eternity.
Neither you nor I can read this enigma's solution.
Our talk with one another takes place behind a curtain.
Once the curtain drops, neither you nor I will remain.

[10]

Oh how long we will not exist but the world will go on!

Our name will not remain, no sign of us will exist.
Before this we did not exist, nor was it any loss.
After this when we do not exist, it will be the same.

Oh comrades, when it happens that you meet,
It is right that you pause to remember the friend.
When you drink your savoury wine in company
And my turn comes up, invert an empty glass for me.