

Trio to Offer an Evening of Poetry, Music, Dance

by David Steinberg - Albuquerque Journal

SANTA FE - A trio of performers is making the old new.

Ancient cultures of the East and the West have, at one time or another, performed poetry, music and dance together, says Zuleikha, a Santa Fe-based dancer.

In a revival of this near-universal tradition, Zuleikha is gathering on the same stage with cellist David Darling and poet Coleman Barks.

Zuleikha inserted the word "gratitude" in the title of the event. "It's Thanksgiving so it's a time of the year when people pay attention to that sort of thing," she said. "So I decided that it would be wonderful if it had expressions of gratitude in it."

Trained in Kathak, a North Indian classical dance form, Zuleikha has staged one-woman shows of her ecstatic dancing and has worked with Japanese New Age artist Kitaro and veteran Nigerian drummer Babba Olatunji.

She has also performed with Barks and Darling in duets - and Barks and Darling have worked as a pair - though this is the first time they are a trio.

On Friday and Saturday, they will perform - together and individually - the Eastern poetry of Rumi, Hafiz and Lalla and the Western poetry of Tennessee Williams, Cormac McCarthy, Emily Dickinson and Edna St. Vincent Millay.

"I wanted to bring together the familiar with the different," Zuleikha said. "The three of us will perform simultaneously and solo so that it's not boring."

The "Sweet Rivers" in the event title, Barks said, is from an Appalachian hymn of thanksgiving: "*Sweet Rivers of redeeming love lie just before mind eyes/Had I the pinions of a dove I'd to those rivers rise.*"

The poet Rumi, he said, was the first whirling dervish "so he did a kind of moving meditation with his poems, and for several hundred years dervishes have done that movement, and I've read poems with Dervishes moving on the state." Dervishes are Moslems who sing and dance as acts of ecstatic devotion.

"I'm interested in experimenting in the spoken language with music and dance and the way in which the arts deepen and resonate with each other," said Barks, a creative writing teacher at the University of Georgia who has worked with the Paul Winter Consort.

Zuleikha met Darling in the 1970s when they taught at the Omega Institute for Holistic Studies in upstate New York.

"At Omega," Darling said in an interview from his Cornwall, Conn., home, "we were good friends and respectful of each other's art and artistic nature. And we had the opportunity to do more or less what we'll be creating in Santa Fe - a collaborative improvisatory dialogue..."

Darling calls himself a "maverick" cellist to differentiate himself from masters like Yo Yo Ma.

"As a cellist heavily trained in classical music and as a composer and experimenter I don't think 'master' fits me," he said. "I like 'maverick' because I'm likely to play very serious music and then play hillbilly music."