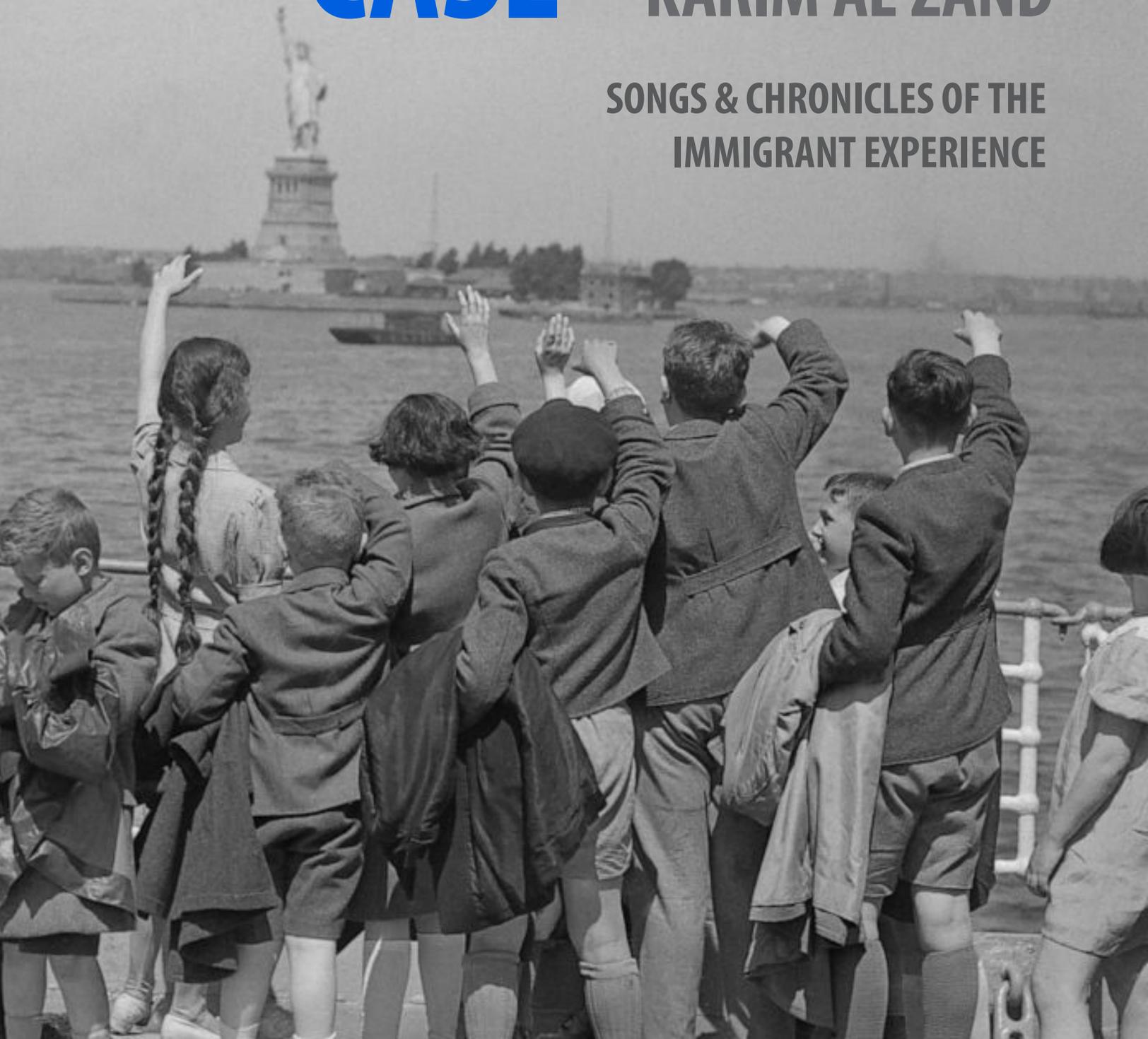


# THE STRANGERS' CASE

KARIM AL-ZAND

SONGS & CHRONICLES OF THE  
IMMIGRANT EXPERIENCE



# THE STRANGERS' CASE



**I**t is a truism that the United States is a country founded and strengthened by immigrants. However, current events remind us that this fact slips all too easily from our consciousness. Historically, as now, we have sometimes failed to lift our lamp of welcome. Despite being a foundational part of the American story, newcomers to this country have frequently faced profound mistreatment, exploitation and structural injustice. Nonetheless, the uniquely American immigrant story continues to be an inspirational beacon to the world.

*The Strangers' Case* is a work for tenor and string orchestra that presents songs and chronicles of the immigrant experience. The piece gathers together poems and narratives about the perennial journey of the "stranger." The work's title originates in Shakespeare's monologue for Sir Thomas More, which eloquently argues for empathy and compassion towards displaced people. *The Strangers' Case* reminds us of our shared history, though it is fraught with contradiction, filled with both selfless generosity and selfish indifference.

By using texts that span diverse nationalities, stories, voices, and historical periods, *The Strangers' Case* aims to make a case of its own: though our commitment to immigrants and refugees has been equivocal, nonetheless their success forms the basis of American strength and renewal. As the child of an immigrant, I believe this sort of consciousness-raising is the only way forward. And as an artist, I believe that music is an ideal spark to kindle the altruism in our better natures.

Karim Al-Zand.



**KARIM AL-ZAND**

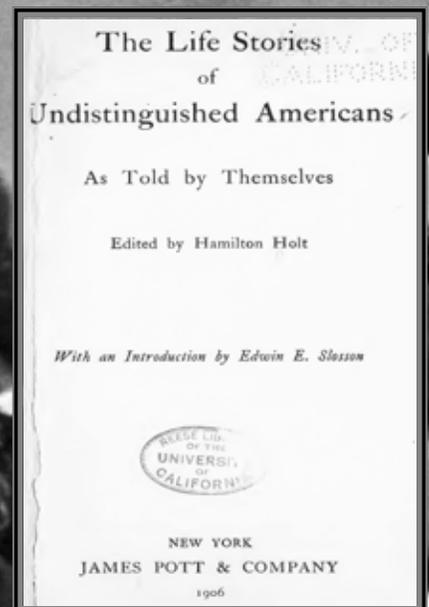
**SONGS & CHRONICLES OF THE  
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*The Strangers' Case* begins with a journey, using two texts from a unique book, "Life Stories of Undistinguished Americans As Told by Themselves," (1906) a collection of personal, turn-of-the-century accounts by immigrants to the United States. We hear the words of a Polish girl and a young Syrian refugee, each describing their grueling Atlantic voyage and their first glimpse of the New York City harbor: "We saw the big woman with the spikes on her head," "Big buildings towering up...outlined in the darkness, in chains and rows, and circles and ropes of various colored lights... Never was there such an illumination!"

## 1. The Lady in the Harbor/Such an Illumination

We came by steerage on a steamship  
in a very dark place that smelt dreadfully.  
There were hundreds of other people packed in:  
men, women, children, almost all of them sick.  
Twelve days to cross the sea.  
We thought we should die, but at last the voyage was over,  
and we came up and saw the beautiful bay  
and the big woman with the spikes on her head  
and the lamp that is lighted at night in her hand.

We passed close by the grand Statue of Liberty.  
Big buildings towering up, like our own mountain peaks—  
I was almost prepared to see snow on their tops,  
though it was summer time—  
outlined in the darkness,  
in chains and rows, and circles and ropes of various colored lights:  
diamonds and rubies, emeralds, pearls, topazes and all other gems.  
Never was there such an illumination!  
When we first came we expected to return to Syria.  
But we have stayed until we have put out roots.



PHOTOS: p. 1, Jewish refugee children wave to the Statue of Liberty in NYC harbor, 1939, US Holocaust Memorial Museum; p. 2-3, Immigrants arrive at Ellis Island Federal Immigration Station, 1907; above, Immigrants wave to the Statue of Liberty at Ellis Island Federal Immigration Station, 1909



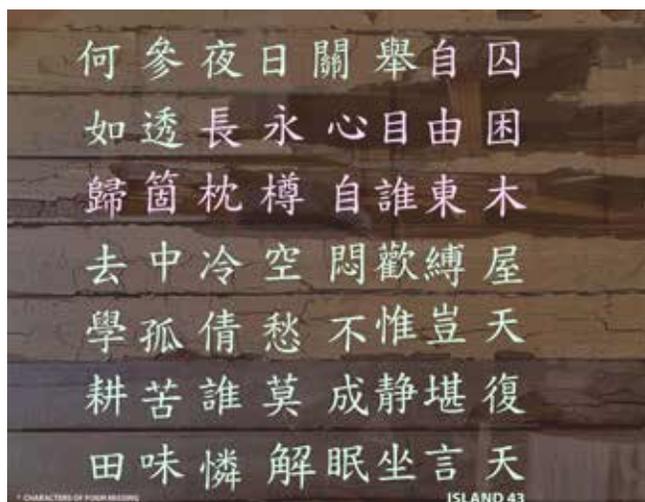
Among its texts, **The Strangers' Case** includes one of a series of anonymous poems found carved into the barrack walls of the Angel Island immigrant detention facility in San Francisco Bay. More than 150 poems and inscriptions were written by the men and women imprisoned there in the early 20th century, in the wake of the Asian Exclusion Act. Poem #43, *Who Can Pity My Loneliness?* is translated from Toisanese (a Cantonese dialect).

*Inside the Angel Island Immigration Station. Courtesy Jon B. Lovelace Collection, Photographs in Carol M. Highsmith's America Project, Library of Congress,*

## 2. Who Can Pity My Loneliness?

Imprisoned in the wooden building day after day,  
My freedom withheld; how can I bear to talk about it?  
Nights are long and the pillow cold;  
who can pity my loneliness?  
I came to the United States because I was poor.  
How was I to know fate would be so perverse as to imprison me?  
The insects chirp outside the four walls.  
The inmates often sigh.  
Thinking of affairs back home,  
Unconscious tears wet my lapel.

*Island of Angels Anonymous, translated  
Angel Island Detention Center Walls (1920?)*



CHARACTERS BY FOUR MILLIONS

ISLAND 43

### 3. Whither Would You Go?

Imagine that you see the wretched strangers,  
Their babies at their backs and their poor luggage,  
Plodding to the ports and coasts for transportation.  
Whither would you go?  
You must needs be strangers.  
Would you be pleased to find a nation of such barbarous temper,  
That would not afford you an abode on earth?  
This is the strangers' case.  
[And this your mountainish inhumanity.]

from Sir Thomas More *William Shakespeare* (1601)

### 4. The Stranger Within My Gate

The stranger within my gate,  
He may be true or kind,  
But he does not talk my talk—  
I cannot feel his mind.  
I see the face and the eyes and the mouth,  
But not the soul behind.  
Wide open and unguarded stand our gates,  
And through them a wild throng presses—  
Bringing unknown gods and rites,  
In street and alley: what loud, accents of menace.  
O Liberty, white Goddess! is it well  
to leave the gates unguarded?  
With hand of steel stay those who pass the sacred portal  
to waste the gifts of freedom.

*The Stranger Rudyard Kipling* (1912)

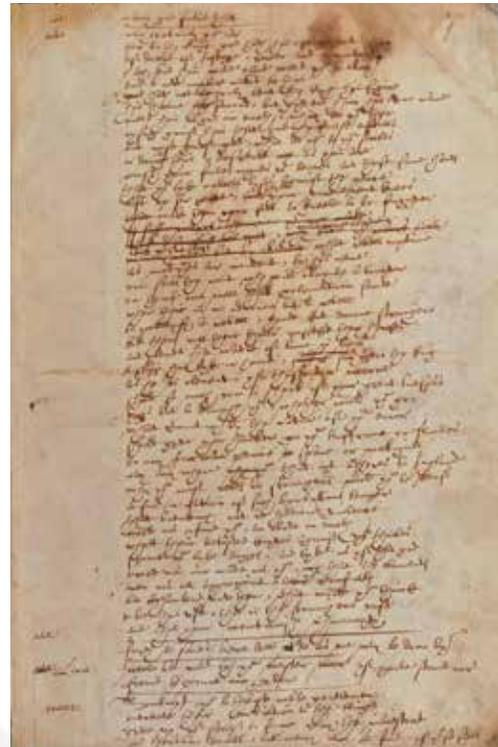
*Unguarded Gates Thomas Bailey Aldrich* (1895)

### 5. They Came from Terror and Tumult

They came from terror and tumult  
fleeing the bombed provinces where only  
the death knell tolls—  
They came from the confines of a world  
lost forever...and lost for nothing!  
They carried on horses, on foot,  
in carriages of funeral splendor,  
or on old fire engines,  
everything that is saved  
—in that blind moment of anguish—  
what was a home, a custom,  
a landscape, a time of the soul:  
a portrait of a boy dressed as an admiral,  
a magic lantern projector.

*Éxodo Jaime Torres Bodet* (1950)

by **Jaime Torres Bodet** (1902-1974) a Mexican writer, politician and the second Director-General of UNESCO. His "Éxodo" [Exodus] evocatively describes long lines of refugees fleeing their homeland with all their possessions, an image Bodet possibly encountered during the Mexican revolution, a conflict which the poet lived through as a child. That war sent thousands fleeing violence into Texas. (The photo above shows refugees arriving at Fort Bliss in 1914.)



Facsimile of a page by "Hand D" from the Elizabethan play Sir Thomas More, possibly William Shakespeare's handwriting.



Refugees from the Mexican Revolution arrive at Fort Bliss, Texas in 1914

Whither Would You Go? uses **William Shakespeare's** powerful monologue for Sir Thomas More, in which the Catholic martyr addresses anti-immigrant rioters in 16th-century London. The Stranger Within My Gate is a setting of passages from two virulently xenophobic poems by **Rudyard Kipling** (1865-1936) and **Thomas Bailey Aldrich** (1836-1907): "The Stranger" and "Unguarded Gates". They Came from Terror and Tumult is excerpted from a descriptive poem translated from the Spanish

*Exile is a melancholic poem by **Hart Crane** (1899–1932) about lovers who are separated by distance. When Dawn Comes to the City is by **Claude McKay** (1890-1948) a writer, poet, and central figure in the Harlem Renaissance. He was also an immigrant, having come to the US in 1914 from Jamaica. His touching poem contrasts New York City's dreary tenements with a nostalgic idyll in the Caribbean.*

## 6. Exile

My hands have not touched pleasure since your hands,—  
No,—nor my lips freed laughter since 'farewell',  
And with the day, distance again expands  
Voiceless between us, as an uncoiled shell.

Yet, love endures, though starving and alone.  
A dove's wings clung about my heart each night  
With surging gentleness, and the blue stone  
Set in the tryst-ring has but worn more bright.

*Harold Hart Crane (1926)*

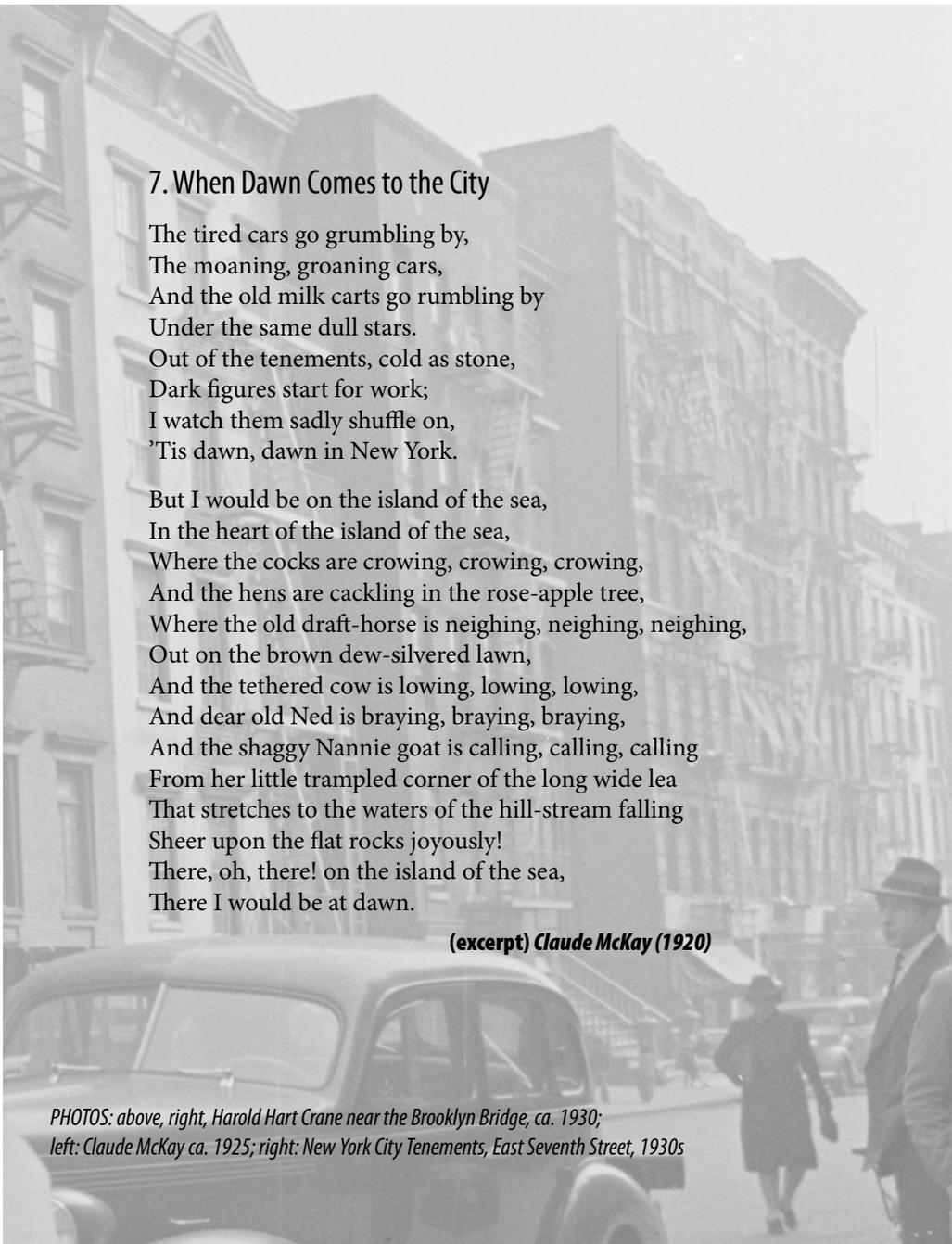


## 7. When Dawn Comes to the City

The tired cars go grumbling by,  
The moaning, groaning cars,  
And the old milk carts go rumbling by  
Under the same dull stars.  
Out of the tenements, cold as stone,  
Dark figures start for work;  
I watch them sadly shuffle on,  
'Tis dawn, dawn in New York.

But I would be on the island of the sea,  
In the heart of the island of the sea,  
Where the cocks are crowing, crowing, crowing,  
And the hens are cackling in the rose-apple tree,  
Where the old draft-horse is neighing, neighing, neighing,  
Out on the brown dew-silvered lawn,  
And the tethered cow is lowing, lowing, lowing,  
And dear old Ned is braying, braying, braying,  
And the shaggy Nannie goat is calling, calling, calling  
From her little trampled corner of the long wide lea  
That stretches to the waters of the hill-stream falling  
Sheer upon the flat rocks joyously!  
There, oh, there! on the island of the sea,  
There I would be at dawn.

*(excerpt) Claude McKay (1920)*



*PHOTOS: above, right, Harold Hart Crane near the Brooklyn Bridge, ca. 1930;  
left: Claude McKay ca. 1925; right: New York City Tenements, East Seventh Street, 1930s*

A remarkable and prescient 1908 poem by **Arthur Upson** (1877–1908), *The Statue of Liberty* (New York Harbor, A.D. 2900), imagines a city of the far future: the Statue of Liberty is unearthed, sunken in the mire, discovered by a “tyrant who misrules our land.” The piece concludes with **Emily Dickinson’s** (1830–1886) powerful four-line verse, *These Strangers, in a Foreign World* an admonition to friendship and kindness.

## 8. The Statue of Liberty, New York Harbor, AD 2900

*Arthur Wheelock Upson (1908)*

Here once, the records show, a land with pride  
 in freedom’s watchword! And once here  
 The port of traffic for a hemisphere,  
 With great gold-piling cities at her side,  
 A sculptured goddess with hospitable smile  
 And clear torch scanned the isle  
 For all wild hordes that sought her.  
 ’Twas centuries ago. But this is true:  
 The tyrant who misrules our land now trembles,  
 His serfs digging deep in marshes,  
 Drawing from this swampy bed of ancient sand  
 A shattered torch in a mighty hand.



Daguerreotype of Emily Dickinson ca. 1846

## 9. These Strangers, in a Foreign World

*Emily Dickinson (1890)*

These strangers, in a foreign world,  
 Protection asked of me—  
 Befriend them, lest yourself in heaven  
 Be found a refugee—

## THE STRANGERS’ CASE (2025)

### SONGS & CHRONICLES OF THE IMMIGRANT EXPERIENCE

The Lady in the Harbor  
 Who Can Pity My Loneliness?  
 Whither Would You Go?  
 The Stranger Within My Gate

They Came from Terror and Tumult  
 Exile  
 When Dawn Comes to the City  
 The Statue of Liberty, New York Harbor, A.D. 2900  
 These Strangers

## Karim Al-Zand

Sadie Frowne, Anonymous, 1906  
 anonymous, ca. 1920  
 William Shakespeare, 1601  
 Thomas Bailey Aldrich, 1895  
 Rudyard Kipling, 1912  
 Jaime Torres Bodet, 1950  
 Hart Crane, 1926  
 Claude McKay, 1920  
 Arthur Wheelock Upson, 1908  
 Emily Dickinson, 1890



**PREMIERE** *Kinetic Ensemble*, presented by *Musiqa* 328/2026, *Karim Sulayman*, tenor; repeat performance: *A Far Cry* 5/9/2026

**COMPOSER (alzand.com)** Karim Al-Zand’s (b.1970) music is acclaimed for its expressive power and imaginative spirit, described by the Boston Globe as “strong and startlingly lovely.” His works have been performed across North America and internationally, and have earned him distinctions from the American Academy of Arts and Letters and the Barlow Foundation. Al-Zand’s catalogue of works spans orchestra, opera, chamber, vocal and solo repertoire. His music embraces a variety of interests, issues and influences. It explores connections between sound and other art forms, drawing inspiration from graphic art, myths and fables, folk music of the world, film, poetry, jazz, and his own Middle Eastern heritage. From compositions for young audiences to scores for dance to interdisciplinary projects, his music resonates with a wide range of listeners and collaborators. Al-Zand was born in Tunis, Tunisia, raised in Ottawa, Canada and has taught composition since 2000 at the Shepherd School of Music, Rice University, Houston.

**SOLOIST (karimsulayman.com)** Lebanese-American tenor Karim Sulayman has garnered international attention as a sophisticated and versatile artist, praised for his “lucid, velvety tenor and pop-star charisma” (BBC Music Magazine). The 2019 Best Classical Solo Vocal GRAMMY® Award winner, he continues to earn acclaim for his original and innovative programming and recording projects, while regularly performing on the world’s stages in opera, orchestral concerts, recital and chamber music.

