

**JOHN ROSENWALD**

**A Conversation with Coleman Barks**

*Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing,  
there is a field. I'll meet you there.*

*When the soul lies down in that grass,  
the world is too full to talk about.  
Ideas, language, even the phrase each other  
doesn't make any sense.*

—Jelaluddin Rumi

translated by Coleman Barks

In 1975 Robert Bly gathered at a Colorado woods camp fifty artists, poets, musicians, dancers, and others interested in the Swiss psychologist/mythologist C. G. Jung for a ten-day Conference on the Mother. Thirty-five years later the tradition of imaginative enactment and serious study of interrelationships between mythology and artistic endeavor continues as the Annual Conference on the Great Mother and the New Father.

One of the most successful and productive outcomes of the conference has been collaborative presentations of classic Sufi poetry in translation with music by Marcus Wise on tabla and David Whetstone on sitar. Robert Bly began this experiment in 1977 at the third conference, held near Sebago Lake, Maine, when he, David, and Marcus together introduced at a closing concert the poetry of the Indian mystic Kabir. Already the previous year Robert had suggested to Coleman Barks that he begin to translate or retranslate writings by the thirteenth-century Persian poet Jelaluddin Rumi. Soon Coleman began to read with Marcus and David as well.

Ann Arbor and I participated in that first conference, thrilled to that first concert, and longed for many years to sponsor such an event on the Beloit College campus. In November 2009, students at the college, in cooperation with the English Department, invited Coleman, David, and Marcus to perform as the initial event in the college's annual International Week and as the culmination of Ann's and my thirty-four years of teaching and creating community in Beloit. On the day of the performance, Ann and I sat with Coleman in the college library and talked about