

THE FORGOTTEN KINGDOM

GUY MENDILOW ENSEMBLE



SCENE GUIDE & PROGRAM NOTES



INDEX

Click on each heading below to navigate to that section

Story Synopsis

Scene Guide

- [At-A-Glance: Scene by Scene](#)
- [Notes & Historical Background](#)

[An Entirely Too-Brief Overview Of Ladino Song](#)

[Why We Tell These Stories](#)

[Calling a Fig a Fig: Navigating Tensions Between Cultural Curation & Artistic Creation](#)

[Personal Connections](#)

[Biographies: Cast & Crew](#)

[Support This Work](#)

THE FORGOTTEN KINGDOM

Directed and produced by Guy Mendilow

Story: Guy Mendilow

Score: Guy Mendilow. Additional composition: Tomoko Omura, Chris Baum & Andy Bergman

Script: Guy Mendilow & Alison James

Sand Animation: Kseniya Simonova

Theatrical Projection Design: Seághan McKay

Scenic Design: Seághan McKay

Lighting Design: Karen Perlow

Executive Producer: BroadBand Collaborative

Onstage artists:

Chris Baum — Violin

Andy Bergman — Clarinet, Thumb Pianos, Jaw Harps

Keita Ogawa / Rich Stein — Percussion

Guy Mendilow — Artistic Director; Narration; Voice, Guitar, Musical Bow

Mike Rivard — Basses, Sintir

Sofía Tosello — Voice

Stage Management: Davison Scandrett

Projection Operation: Seághan McKay

Graphic Design: Jesse Ciarmataro

Guy Mendilow Ensemble is grateful to BabsonARTS and the community of Babson College for their support of the development of this work.

The Forgotten Kingdom premiered at Babson College on March 23, 2023

Management & Exclusive Tour Representation:

Cadenza Artists International | (310) 896-8527 info@cadenzaartists.com

www.guymendilowensemble.com

STORY SYNOPSIS

Years after the wars, a young woman tries to understand more about herself by sifting through memories captured in a book her mother made for her, filled with drawings and stories, songs and words so that, when she was grown, she would remember how it felt to live in their family home by the sea. Between the lines, she sees how her mother tried to show the reasons for the choices her parents had to make as the Ottoman Empire splintered into ethnic nation states.

The memory book's pages evoke an entire world all but lost, and turning the pages is like rewinding time. In the book she glimpses her family and her neighbours. She remembers the stories they told and moments they shared. The pages evoke an entire way of life that — to a child — once seemed eternal.

But even the mundane can feel poignant looking back after the changes of wars and migrations. Those people, frozen in the snapshots, had little idea what was coming around the bend, or how the dots would continue to connect.



SCENE GUIDE

Memories are usually not linear. The very act of remembering is a kind of time-travel as we look at the past through the lens of the present. The storytelling in *The Forgotten Kingdom* moves between times, locations, and characters. Strung together, these vignettes offer a personal, and sweeping, family story.

This Scene Guide will anchor you. It has two parts:

- The **At-A-Glance** section offers a quick summary of each scene that you can read while following the live performance.
- The **Notes & Historical Background** section deepens the experience with intriguing historical background. We recommend leaving this section for after the show.





AT A GLANCE: SCENE BY SCENE

Act I

Scene 1: Prelude

1943

A girl emerges from hiding to find her family home in ruins. In the rubble she finds a book of memory her mother made for her.

Scene 2: The Sky as My Canvas, the Trees as My Pen

The sung lyrics mean:

“The mountain ahead burns.

It is there that I lost what I held as dearest.

Those who have not gone through such loss cannot truly understand, neither family nor neighbors.

I will take the sky as my canvas,

the seas for ink

and the trees for a pen,

so that I may tell my story”

Scene 3: The Book of Memory

1953

The girl — now a young woman — pages through the book of memory her mother made for her, full of drawings and stories, songs and words, so that, when she was grown, she would remember her what it felt like to live in her family’s home by the sea in a place that had been part of the Ottoman Empire. stringing together memories from her family’s lives in the former Ottoman Empire. As she does, moments from her childhood stir to life.





Scene 4: Her Great-Grandmother's Story: Sisters, Queen & Captive

An old ballad (called a *romanza*) the girl's great-grandmother sang around the hearth, or while handling housekeeping chores, in the days when home was still part of the Ottoman Empire.

This favorite of the girl's family tells of a queen's radical decision towards justice.

Scene 5: Her Parents Meet — Part 1

A recollection of her parents' memorable first encounter as youths, the unfortunate impression her father made on her mother, and what her mother did about it.

Scene 6: Her Great-Grandmother's Story: Night Visit

A second ballad sung by the girl's great-grandmother. The tale of a queen who infiltrates a cavalry camp to pass a message to her secret lover.

Scene 7: Her Great-Grandmother's Story: The Siren

Another of her great-grandmother's tales. This one tells of a sailor bewitched by the siren of the sea.

Scene 8: Her Father Grows Up

A chronicle of some of the tremendous changes and uncertainties through which her parents lived at the start of the 20th century.

Act II

Scene 1: Her Parents' New Home

A calamitous fire destroys much of her parents' city, causing widespread homelessness. In the fire, her parents lose their city-center home. Her parents lose one another in the throngs and find one another in a refugee camp. Pushed out of the city center, the parents relocate to a more dilapidated home on the outskirts.

Scene 2: Her Parents' Difficult Decision

In the face of increasing tensions, the girl's parents deliberate whether to stay in their city or seek safety in a new land. To make sense of unfolding events, her parents rely on their experience of past difficulties. Their history suggests the current challenges will also eventually work themselves out, and that, with patience, there will again be a happy ending.

Scene 3: Her Romanian Cousins' Resilience

An anecdote of hope and possibility. This story is of her Romanian cousins who aided the resistance and escaped from a work camp to get married, despite the war.

Based on a true story. See Notes & Historical Background

Scene 4: Alone in the World

1943

The girl and her mother are deported to Nazi concentration camps because they are Jewish. The mother saves her daughter.





Scene 5: Recalling Her Neighbors' Fate

The fate of the girl's mother, as well as of so many relatives, friends and neighbors.

Based on a true story. See Notes & Historical Background

Scene 6: Her Father's Statement

Her father's statement of opposition after his wife and daughter are deported and he is spared because the soldiers recognize him as a war hero.

Based on a true story. See Notes & Historical Background

Scene 7: Her Own Story, Drawn Into the Book

The girl has added her own story to the family histories in the book of memory. Here she shows some of the small decisions, kindnesses, and coincidences that, ultimately, enabled her to begin again in a new home.

NOTES & HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

STOP!
WE RECOMMEND LEAVING THIS SECTION FOR BEFORE OR AFTER THE PERFORMANCE
— BUT NOT DURING.





The Forgotten Kingdom is driven by historical and cultural fascination, and the feeling that study of these histories and cultures has much to tell us about ourselves. However, I am neither a historian nor an ethnologist. I am a catcher and teller of stories who relies on the scholarship of historians, ethnomusicologists and ethnologists. This project is indebted to the research, publications, lectures and courses of Devin Naar, Leon Sciaky, Max Bergholz, Judith Cohen and Susanna Weich Shahack, and to Joel Bresler's digitized collection of old Ottoman Jewish music. What follows is not even a scratch on the surface of these researchers' work, let alone the vast, complex world of Ottoman Jews. Any errors or over-generalizations in the notes below are, of course, mine alone.
— Guy Mendilow

Introduction: Why Look at Ottoman Society in the Late 19th & Early 20th Centuries?

The Forgotten Kingdom does not overlook, excuse or glorify many of the actions of the Ottoman Empire, especially in its final decades, during which over a million Armenians were deported to their deaths. Nevertheless, understanding the ways Ottoman society was organized brings up worthwhile questions, especially when juxtaposed with modern societies, particularly multiethnic ones like the US.

For example, the concept of race as we know it in the US today would have been largely alien in the Ottoman Empire. Instead, Ottoman identity was principally organized around religion. Founded in approximately 1299, the Empire itself was Muslim, and its Sultan was the Caliph, the leader of Islam. As *Dhimmi* — People of the Book — Jews and Christians were guaranteed a place in Ottoman society, were protected and had relative autonomy, as long as they fulfilled obligations like taxes.

The Empire spanned Muslim, Jewish and Christian ethnic and language groups from North Africa into the Balkans, Mediterranean and Middle East. While Jews and Christians faced restrictions Muslim Ottomans did not — for example, until the 19th century they were barred from military service — many members of Christian and Jewish communities felt strongly about the protections they received. “The Ottoman Empire is entirely open to you, settle here, our brethren, in the best of the land!” wrote Jews of Salónica to Jews in Provence, France in 1550. “The poor and needy, however, who do not possess any resources, will find here a place where their feet can rest, and they will be able to exercise a suitable profession; they will suffer neither hunger nor thirst, they will not be afflicted by the burning fire of oppression and of exile...because the Turks do not let us suffer any evil or oppression.” Similar sentiments were expressed by members of Christian Orthodox communities, protected by the Sultan from Christian Catholics in Western Europe.

On the one hand, members of the many disparate religious, ethnic and language communities sometimes had very little to do with one another, even when living in the same geography. Even in the same city, it was as if there were parallel worlds: Communities had their own laws, schools, commerce and religious institutions. Members of different communities may not even have shared a language unless there was a specific reason to speak a common tongue, like trade or civil administration. On the other hand, members of one ‘parallel world’ were no more Ottoman than members of another. Difference itself was a *de facto* aspect of Ottoman identity and — especially with the progressive reforms of the late 19th and early 20th centuries — such diversity was seen as a source of Ottoman strength. The historical tensions faced by members of hyphenated identity groups in the US — from African Americans to Asian Americans, Muslim Americans and so many other identities — were largely absent in the Ottoman Empire. For the most part, there was little identity conflict between being full-fledge Jewish, or Christian, or Muslim of one ethnicity or another and being full-fledge Ottoman, at least until the 19th century.

This is far from implying that bigotry, or forms of slavery for that matter, did not exist in the Ottoman Empire. Both were indeed part of Ottoman life. However, such bigotry, even slavery, was organized according to fundamentally different definitions of identity than those familiar in the Western hemisphere.



It is significant to note, as Voltaire did in 1763, that until the 18th century there were no records of Jewish or Christian revolts. Prior to the 19th century, the principal rebellions were instigated by Shiaites from Persian territories, who were perpetually persecuted by the Suni Ottoman Empire. Moreover, on the whole, instances of inter-group violence — like the pogroms of the Russian Empire — were largely absent from the Ottoman Empire until the 19th and 20th centuries. The increase in inter-group violence is linked with the carving away of Ottoman territories into ethnic nation states premised on the notion of *one* language, *one* religion, *one* ethnicity for a specific portion of land, with language becoming a far more important identity marker. What identities had to be erased, and invented, for such a multiethnic society to fragment this way? What were the human costs?

ACT I NOTES & BACKGROUND

Scene 1: Prelude

The music in this scene is based on a wedding song (*cantiga de boda*) from Salónica, from the late nineteenth/early twentieth century, celebrating a young woman who leaves behind an older life and steps into a new one.

- Music: La Galana Y La Mar. Traditional Ottoman Jewish, Arr. Guy Mendilow

Scene 2: The Sky as My Canvas, the Trees as My Pen

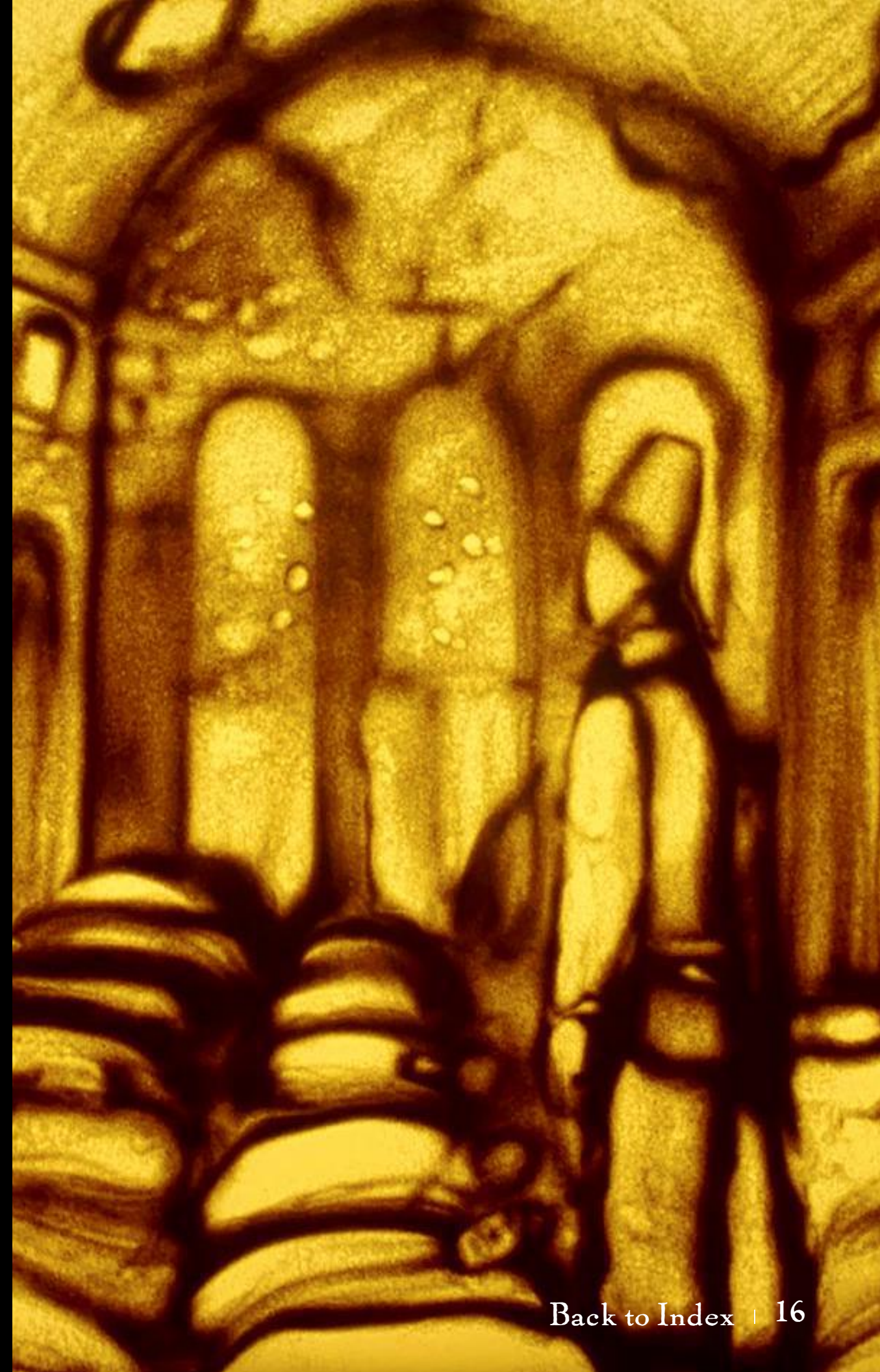
- Music: Esta Montaña D'Enfrenté, Traditional Ottoman Jewish, Arr. Guy Mendilow

Scene 3: The Book of Memory

Much of the story takes place in a fictitious city largely based on Salónica, a multiethnic cosmopolitan Balkan port vital to the Ottoman Empire. In the Balkan Wars of 1912, Salónica became part of Greece and is known today as Thessaloniki.

In the early 20th century, Salónica's population was approximately 160,000, of which over 50% was Jewish, approximately 23% was Muslim and approximately 23% was Christian (predominantly Greek Christians as well as smaller number of Bulgarian Christians). The remaining 5% included "Europeans," Roma and Armenians. These communities had lived together for over 400 years. Interethnic violence in Salónica did not occur until the first decades of the 20th century.

- Music: Guy Mendilow & Andy Bergman





Scene 4: Her Great-Grandmother's Story: Sisters, Queen & Captive

This scene is based on a *romanza*, a traditional ballad form with a prescribed syllable and rhyme scheme. The known melodies for this particular song are from the late 19th/early 20th centuries. However, the lyrics predate the 1492 Jewish expulsion from Spain. They tell a pseudo-historical story once popular in Jewish, Christian and Muslim communities of the Iberian Peninsula. Versions of this legend were preserved by the Jews in their diaspora after being lost to the Christians and Muslims.

- Music: Hermanas Reina Y Cautiva. Traditional Ottoman Jewish, Arr. Guy Mendilow & Andy Bergman

Scene 5: Her Parents Meet — Part 1

The education of girls and women played an important role in Salónica's social fabric. The first girls school in Salónica — the Christian Girls School — opened in 1845, primarily serving the Orthodox Christian community (though it is likely that in some cases girls from middle and upper class Jewish families also attended). In a city as multicultural as Salónica, impacts reverberated across confessional boundaries, and soon after, progressive Jewish community members began lobbying donors to fund education for Jewish girls.

Starting in 1874, La Alliance Israélite Universelle, a French Jewish educational program, opened the first school for Jewish girls. Girls' vocational training also became more widespread, along with female social aid involvement, especially for middle and upper class Jewish girls.

La Alliance Israélite Universelle opened schools in communities across the Balkans, the Near and Middle East, and in North Africa. Guy's aunt directed a La Alliance school in Palestine. His grandmother taught French in a La Alliance school in the same region.

Salónica's multicultural, cosmopolitan aspects could be glimpsed in many aspects of daily life, from the ways Jewish homes were arranged — Middle class homes like those of Leon Sciacky included a mixture of "Eastern" and "Western" furnishings — to food, from Sahleb sold by Albanians and Persian Madjun sweets to pilafs and kebabs, and the languages people spoke. Many Jews — especially in the middle and upper classes — routinely spoke multiple languages, including Ladino, French, Italian, Turkish, Greek and Bulgarian. Posters for the Cinematograph (presented in French) were frequently advertised in four languages.

This scene also hints at the European influence — French in particular — in cities like Salónica, where it was not uncommon for males and females, especially of younger generations like the girls parents, to dress in "Western style" and lean towards European ideas. "Western" literature and technological wonders like the cinematograph played an increasingly prominent role in daily life for some members of the middle and upper classes. Many even attempted to claim themselves as French nationals, for a variety of reasons including that European nationals were exempt from Ottoman laws.

- Music: (Part 1) Guy Mendilow.
(Part 2) Yo S'un Mancevo Del Dor. Traditional Ottoman Jewish, Arr. Guy Mendilow



Scene 6: Her Great-Grandmother's Story: Night Visit

In the song, we preserve a lyric change (possibly a mistake) captured in the rendition of Rahel Atalef-Brunner (Izmir) who sang this song in Jerusalem on August 27, 1986 for Susana Weich Shachak's ethnomusicological collections (NSA Yc2774/3). The substitution, addition and elimination of lyrics by singers of Ladino song is itself a fascinating way songs continue to adapt and survive, as ethnomusicologist Judith Cohen documents.

- Music: (Part 1) Guy Mendilow.
(Part 2) La Vuelta Del Marido Traditional Ottoman Jewish, Arr. Guy Mendilow

Scene 7: Her Great-Grandmother's Story: The Siren

- Music: La Serena (aka Dame La Mano Palomba), Trad. Ottoman Jewish, Arr. Guy Mendilow

Inspiring examples of this well recorded song include versions by Haim Effendi (1907-1908, Constantinople) and David Saltiel (2011, Thessaloniki)

Scene 8: Her Father Grows Up

This scene depicts many of the changes of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. For example, between 1842-1948 the Jewish press in Salónica exploded with some 105 Jewish newspapers. We see here also the devastation of the Balkan Wars, in which new nation states carved territories out of the Ottoman Empire and then fought one another for territorial control. This scene does not even start to convey the viciousness of the Balkan Wars, or the cycles of hatred and violence these wars set in motion. Finally, in the end of the scene, we see the launch of the First World War.

The impacts of two technological innovations on Ottoman lives like that of the girls parents and grandparents stand out. While the Ottoman world was not static, until the first quarter of the 19th century it was difficult to get around. Travel was slow, mostly overland, by donkey, camel and horse. But all that changed with the arrival of the steamship and railroad. The steamship was first introduced by the British in the 1820s, and it connected port cities both within and beyond the Ottoman Empire. In terms of trade, this was transformational: In the early 19th century, a two-mast sailboat could carry 80 tons of cargo. Steamships could carry 1,250 tons. The changes were also cultural, as the distance between the Ottoman Empire and non-Ottoman ports shrank. Whereas it used to take a month to travel from Salónica to Paris over land, a steamship could cross the distance in 2 weeks. The steamship also opened up possibilities for transcontinental travel, including mass immigration to places like the US.

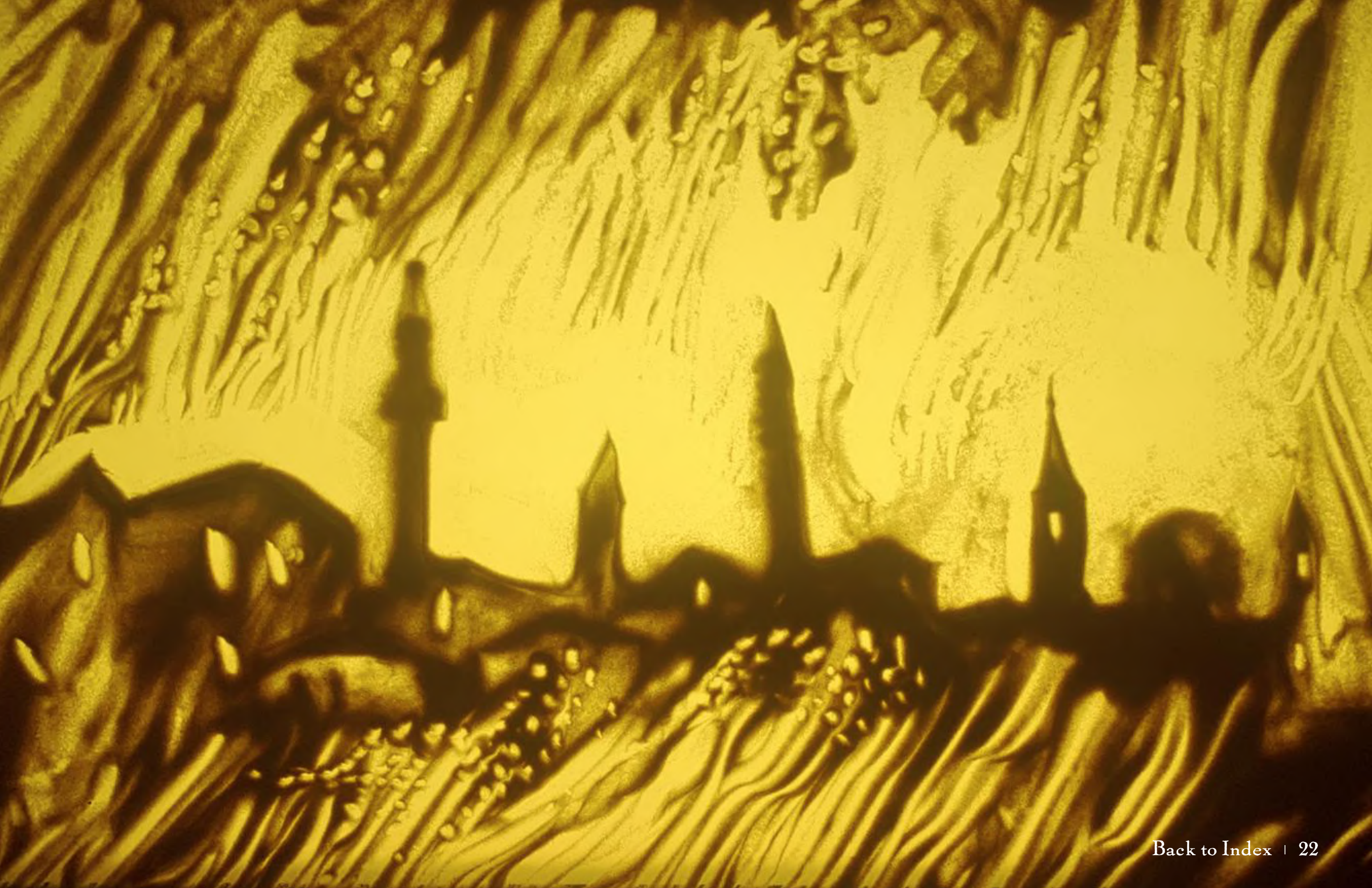
The railroad too revolutionized notions of distance and time. While the railroad had been introduced to the Ottoman Empire in the 1860s, it did not really take off until the early 1900s. But already by 1911, 4,000 miles of track annually carried some 60 million passengers and 2.6 million tons of cargo. One railway car could haul as much as 125 camels. The freight tonnage possible with the railroad created — and broke — entire industries.

The shifts were more than economic. For example, before the railroad, long journeys by donkey, camel or horse necessitated

strong relationships: travelers needed lodging and food on their journeys, and they often found it among people beyond their own religious, ethnic and linguistic communities. For example, a Jewish grain merchant from Salónica might be offered hospitality in the homes of the Bulgarian grain growers with whom he traded. This merchant would have had to be sufficiently conversant in his hosts' languages and familiar with their customs. He would have had to maintain relationships — often with multiple generations of his hosts' families — through thoughtful generosity. Forms of reciprocity would have been expected. These needs were no longer as relevant with the advent of the railroad, which made it possible to travel out and return in the same day. As a consequence, intercommunal bonds eroded.

European influence within Ottoman communities also increased thanks to the railroad and steamship. For example, whereas it used to take one month to travel from Salónica to Paris over land, the railroad could make the journey in 3 days. This intensified the already present Francophilia among some Ottoman citizens like the girl's father, who, in scene 5, sports a Parisian haircut. It is also important to note that the Berlin-Baghdad Railway, started in 1903, would be used to deport millions of Armenians to their deaths in 1915. In 1943, the same trains and tracks would deport tens of thousands of Jews to be murdered in Nazi camps like Auschwitz-Birkenau.

- Music: Por Que Lloras Blanca Niña? Trad. Ottoman Jewish, Arr. Guy Mendilow



ACT II NOTES & BACKGROUND

Scene 1: Her Parents' New Home

In 1912, as part of the first Balkan War, the Ottomans surrendered Salónica to Greece. By this time, the Jewish population had decreased from over 50% to approximately 39%.

In 1917, a terrible fire burned two thirds of the city to the ground. In just 32 hours, some 70,000 inhabitants were left homeless. Of these, 52,000 were Jewish.

The story of the aftermath of the fire differs significantly depending on whose vantage point is presented. According to official Greek tellings, this effectively marked the end of a Jewish presence in Thessaloniki. The Jews who had made up the bulk of the city center left, and, in a feat of civic and architectural ingenuity, the city was rebuilt as modern, 20th century city. And yet there is ample evidence to suggest that Jewish presence not only endured but actually strengthened after the fire of 1917. As Devin Naar writes, “the period after the 1917 fire witnessed the most vibrant Jewish cultural productivity in the city’s history, with more Jewish newspapers, magazines and books published in Ladino (and French, Greek and Hebrew) than ever before.”

Salónica had endured several fires in its Ottoman history. After each, local communities were permitted to rebuild with minimal governmental interference. However, after the 1917 fire the Greek government barred Jews from rebuilding in the city center, auctioning off what had been Jewish parcels to Greek bidders, and preventing the reconstruction of synagogues and mosques. The architecture giving Salónica an Ottoman appearance was replaced by a modern, Greek guise, transforming the downtown into a middle and upper class space that conformed more closely to the national Greek identity intended for Thessaloniki.

Naar, Devin. “A Century Ago, Jewish Salonica Burned. It Was Rebuilt, Only to Be Destroyed Anew.” Jewish Telegraph Agency, 17 Aug. 2017, <https://www.jta.org/2017/08/18/opinion/a-century-ago-jewish-salonica-burned-it-was-rebuilt-only-to-be-destroyed-anew>.

•Music: El Incendio De Salónica (La Cantiga Del Fuego) Trad. Ottoman Jewish, Arr. Guy Mendilow



Scene 2: Her Parents' Difficult Decision

This scene portrays the feeling of listening to the headlines and hoping, sometimes beyond rationality, that one's child will somehow make it through dark times undamaged.

This scene poses questions about how we interpret the world around us: the maps we make in our minds to make sense of unfolding events.

Like early explorers' charts, these cognitive maps show known points of land, as well unknown, blank spots. We often fill in these undrawn spaces according to what we already know.

In this case, the parents create a map that is full of optimism, even though the actual landmarks are unsettling. Both because the past has generally turned out well for them and also because they want so badly for their story to end with a golden "happy-ever-after," they make a mental map that, in retrospect, is blindingly bright.

•Music: (Part 1) Tomoko Omura & Guy Mendilow
(part 2) A La Nana Y A La Buba/ Levantóse El Conde Niño.
Traditional Ottoman Jewish, Arr. Tomoko Omura & Guy Mendilow

Scene 3: Her Romanian Cousins' Resilience

This scene is based on the true story of Guy's grandparents, Nahum and Sara Gush Halav. In 1943, Nahum broke out of a Romanian work camp to get married to his beloved Sara. During his escape, his trousers tore on barbed wire and, consequently, all wedding photos could only be from the waist up. Despite a bounty, Nahum was not recaptured.

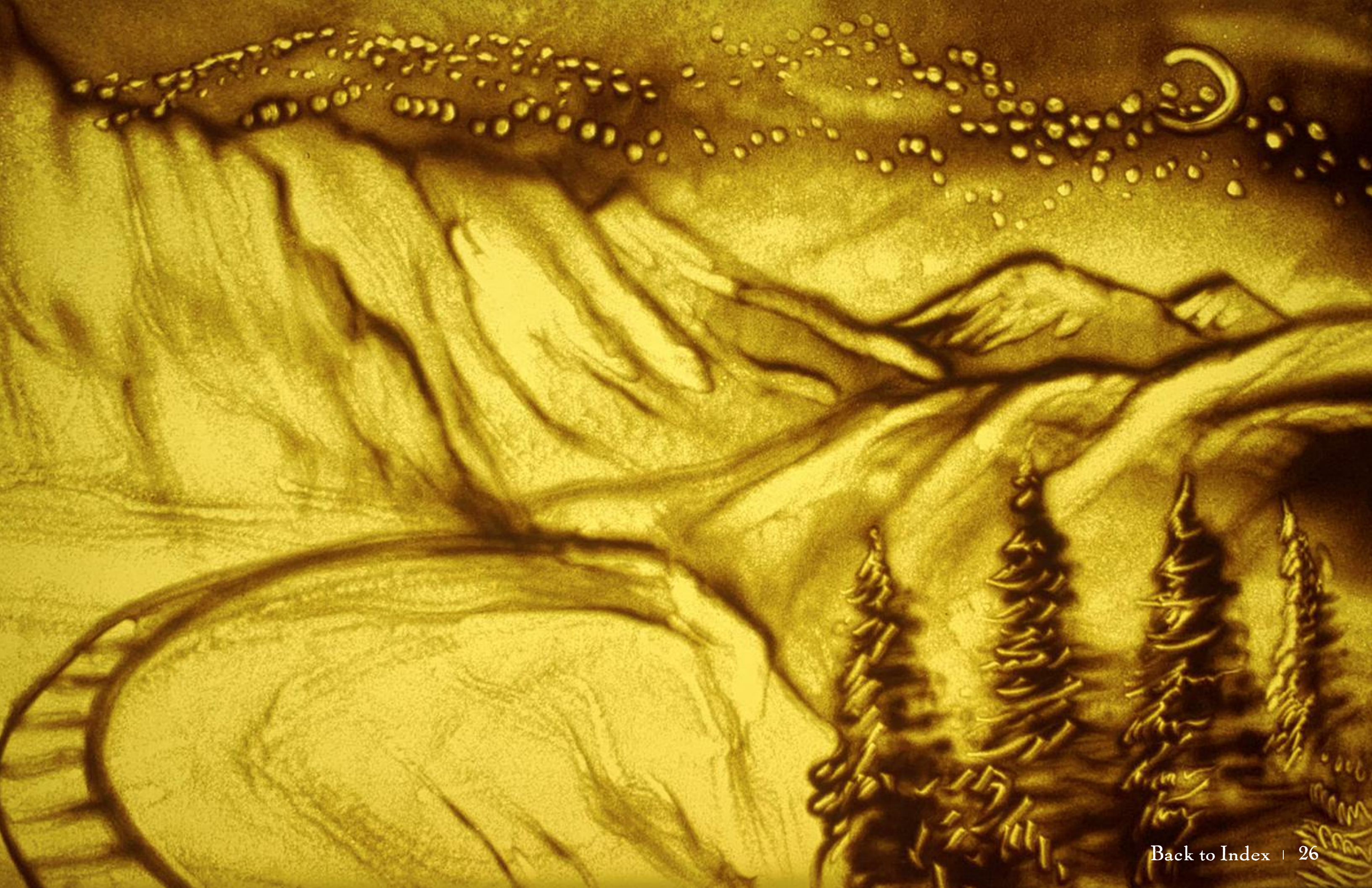
Both Sara and Nahum had been working as part of the underground resistance, helping Jews escape to safety. Nahum ran the “art department” — forging identity papers and other documents. Sara ran the forged documents to smuggle Jews out of Romania and Hungary. Blond, appearing Aryan, Sara also flirted with Romanian and Hungarian soldiers, obtaining and relaying information.

Ultimately, Sara and Nahum escaped to Palestine, then under the British Mandate, concealed aboard a Turkish fishing boat sailing from Constanța, Romania. Three boats set out. The first — on which Sara was initially slated to travel — was bombed in shallow waters. Dogs were used to drown survivors. Of some 200 refugees, 8 survived.

This story is paired with the Ottoman Jewish *El Amor Yo No Sabía*, here arranged to evoke increasing joy and abandon.

It is essential to recognize the differences between such Romanian work camps and Nazi concentration camps, like Auschwitz-Birkenau. Such Nazi death camps represent an extreme of dehumanization and cruelty from which an escape like this would have been unlikely. Of the 802 who attempted escape, only 144 succeeded. Of the approximately 1.3 million sent to Auschwitz, some 1.1 million perished.

- Music: (part 1) Chris Baum
(part 2) *El Amor Yo No Sabía*. Traditional Ottoman Jewish, Arr. Guy Mendilow



Scene 5: Recalling Her Neighbors' Fate

This poem was written in Auschwitz in 1943 by David Haim, from Salónica. At the start of the twentieth century, 50% of Salónica's population was Jewish. By the end of WWII, the city's Jewish population had decreased to approximately 1%. The majority of Salónica's Jewish community was deported to, and murdered in, Auschwitz.

This is representative of Greece as a whole, one of the countries with the highest Jewish mortality rate in WWII. 87% of Greece's Jewish inhabitants perished.

In the camps, Mr. Haim wrote his poem on the paper of a German cement bag. He set his words to the melody of an old Ottoman song. This performance replaces Mr. Haim's melody with newly composed music.

The Kaddish section at the end is an echo of the Jewish prayer of mourning. It is an interrupted/broken Kaddish, because the story of Jews from former Ottoman Empire enclaves, like Salónica, continues to be largely overlooked. The melody for this Kaddish is inspired by a brilliant 1908 recording of Haim Effendi made in Constantinople.

- Words: David Haim, De Salóniki A Auschwitz (Siete Dias Encerrados)
- Translation of David Haim's poem: Guy Mendilow
- Music: Guy Mendilow



Scene 6: Her Father's Statement

This events portrayed in this scene are based on the story of a member of Guy's family.

Some broader observations are also worth pointing out. Many Jews and Christians fought in the Ottoman army in WWI. This was motivated in part by a widespread belief that the various Ottoman communities comprising the Ottoman Empire would be safer and more secure with a preservation of the Ottomanism stemming from the Tanzimat Reforms of 1839 and 1876. In an attempt to shore up the Ottoman Empire against the encroaching territorial threats of nationalist uprisings and European intervention, these reforms extended equal citizenship to Jews, Christians and Muslims of diverse ethnic and linguistic backgrounds, at least rhetorically.

Ultimately, the Ottoman Empire could not prevail due to powerful forces and decisions that intensified cycles of violence. Arguably, one of the most pivotal was the Ottoman deportation of a million Armenian citizens, a genocide that cemented the divides of ethnic nationalism. Other intensifications included a series of "population exchanges," shuffling millions in the creation of new nation states and the inventions of new national identities along ethnic/linguistic lines.

Some of these new nation states would later ally with the Nazis. Together they "removed" ethnic groups that threatened their nascent national identities. This included Jews in communities like Salónica.

•Music: (part 1) Guy Mendilow

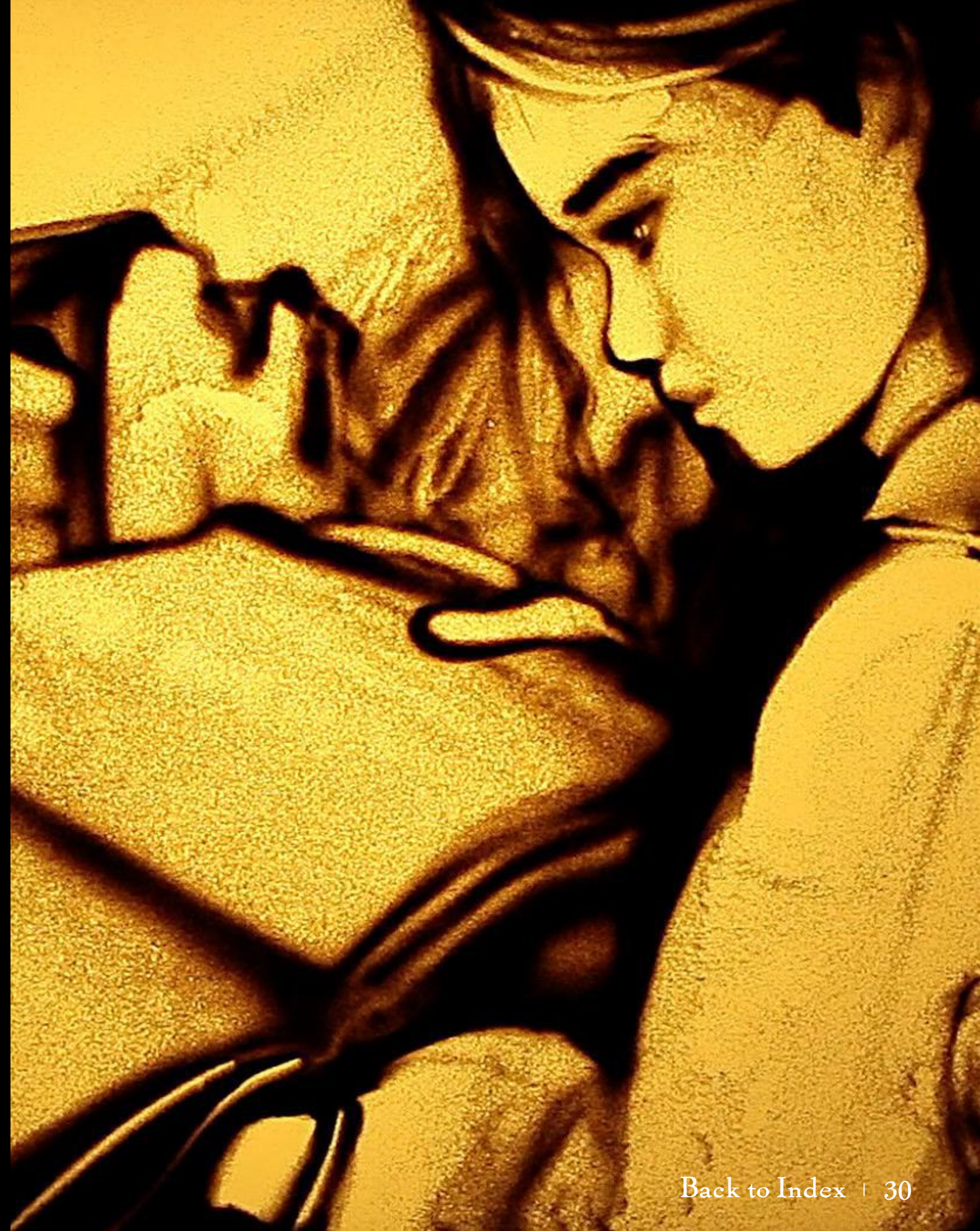
(part 2) Una Noche Al Bodre De La Mar. Traditional Ottoman Jewish, Arr. Guy Mendilow

Scene 7: Her Own Story, Drawn Into the Book

The music in this scene is based on a wedding song from Salónica, from the late 19th/early 20th century, celebrating a young woman who leaves behind an older life and steps into a new one. This song, and its theme of beginning again, is a metaphor for the young woman in *The Forgotten Kingdom* and the community she represents.

This final sand animation shows the London street on which Guy's father grew up after the war, as the city rebuilt.

- Music: (part 1) Guy Mendilow
(part 2) La Galana Y La Mar. Traditional Ottoman Jewish,
Arr. Guy Mendilow



An Entirely Too-Brief Overview of Ladino Song

The final expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492 and from Portugal in 1497 began migrations in which the Jews eventually settled in communities spanning the vast Ottoman Empire, from Northern African and the Mediterranean to the Balkans, and beyond. In each adopted home, languages, food, customs, stories, songs, and music mingled with their hosts. Eventually, cultural and linguistic offshoots evolved.

The Ladino language itself is a beautiful illustration of these patterns. Variouslly called Judezmo, Ladino, Spaniolit, Yehuditze, Hekatia, Saphardi or simply Spanish, the language is more like a number of closely set ribs that form the umbrella term "Judeo-Spanish."

Each community integrated words and expressions from the local language, including Greek, Slavic languages, Arabic, Turkish, and Hebrew. The Judeo-Spanish variations became a kind of linguistic time capsule: The Sephardi Jews preserved the lexis, syntax, morphology and phonology of Medieval Spanish as well as idioms, pronunciation and accent of words which have long since vanished from Spain itself.

Though it is considered an endangered language, Ladino is still spoken by pockets of Jews, today primarily in Israel. In the United States, significant Ladino speaking communities are in Seattle and New York.

The Forgotten Kingdom springboards off of women's songs mainly from the Ottoman Jewish community of Salónica, also known as Thessaloniki after it became part of Greece in 1912. The traditional source music is primarily from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, though the lyrics of a few of these songs are much older, even pre-dating 1492. While these older songs may well have been sung for hundreds of years, there is little evidence left to indicate the melodies and ornamentations used back then. The melodies we know today are much more recent.





Why We Tell These Stories

The distance of time and place can often dull our sense of history. It is easy for events that once shook lives to become abstract intellectualization. For example, we recognize the moral implications of terms like “fascism” from our own historical hindsight but forget that for those caught in the times, the end was far from certain, the day-to-day more complex and ambiguous.

How could it be that people who felt themselves to be moral and just embraced fascism in the pursuit of a better tomorrow — including Jews in Ottoman Salónica? What light does this cast on some of our own struggles today?

In hindsight, we tend to reduce complex ambiguity to simplistic “good” and “bad,” not knowing what such struggles can *feel* like, what they can do to families, to individuals. Viewed from our lens, we take for granted aspects of history, ways of conceiving identity, seeing them as inevitable and pre-ordained.

We forget that there was a time in which the way our world is now organized was anything but obvious or likely, that individual choice played a role in trajectories’ unfolding, and that there were alternative visions that, at the time, felt possible, though they did not play out. This way of seeing in hindsight can remove us from a personal historical identification that could enrich our understanding of dilemmas we face today.

Stories combined with the direct emotional language of music and stirring imagery offer a window into the visceral experience of history that we may otherwise only understand abstractly. This intimate connection fosters greater identification across differences. It cultivates empathy as well as new perspective from which we can both question and interpret some of what we experience in our own moment.



Calling a Fig a Fig: Navigating Tensions Between Cultural Curation & Artistic Creation

Choosing to work with traditional material like Ottoman Jewish music carries responsibilities. For example, I must educate myself about ever-widening historical and cultural contexts. This learning will continue to remain incomplete. Ten years of research inspire confidence that greater depth, more connections and heightened relevance will continue to tantalize. Despite this recognition, I also have to work according to what I have already learned from first, second and third-hand sources. Thankfully, I can skirt some common traps (like representing music from the early 20th century as somehow Medieval) And yet I am vividly aware that I will continue making mistakes that I will recognize only in the future, in retrospect.

Another responsibility is to be honest. I must clearly state where my work falls on the spectrum between Cultural Curation and Artistic Creation (a model I learned from fiddler Andy Reiner). On one end of the continuum, Cultural Curation refers to an “ethnomusicological” effort to capture a snapshot of a song, as it would have been performed at a specific time and place (for example *Ay Mansévo*, as it would have been sung in private Constantinople homes in 1903, or as it was recorded by Isaac Algazi for Columbia Gramophone Company in Istanbul in 1927). On the spectrum’s other end, Artistic Creation indicates an artist’s own interpretation of a song, based on their personal intents, background and aesthetics.

As a child of “Western” nation-states like the USA, Israel and England, raised on a diet of Western classical, classical Hindustani and various folkloric musics, I cannot both “stay true” to an early 20th century Ottoman performance practice and also have my own artistic way with it. However tempting it may be to think it is possible to do both (and however sexy the marketing language may sound), such a claim would mislead, at best. To some degree, even with meticulous attention to the smallest ethnomusicological and linguistic detail, it is all too easy to inadvertently replace the cultural markers signifying a song’s derivation from a particular time and place with my own cultural and aesthetic background. In the case of Ladino song, such claims are unfortunately common. I believe they contribute to myths and misunderstandings, despite artists’ laudable intentions.

And so one of my responsibilities is, as Petrarch said, to “call a fig a fig.”

The music of *The Forgotten Kingdom* deliberately situates towards the Artistic Creation end of the spectrum. Until the early 20th century, the songs you hear in this performance would mainly have been sung in homes and community celebrations like weddings, mostly by untrained women and frequently unaccompanied. For these reasons, some of the best singers will, unfortunately, remain unrecognized. The first professional, commercial, Ottoman recording artists, like Haim Effendi, Albert Beressi and Isaac Algazi, grew up with such folksy private renditions. Effendi, Beressi, Algazi and their peers recorded hundreds of songs for the Constantinople-based Odeon and Orfeon Record Companies and, later, for companies like Columbia Gramophone Company in Istanbul. These early 78-rpm records were primarily purchased by fellow Ottoman Jews whose singing in private homes or community celebrations often became inspired by the recordings.

I have chosen to radically recast these songs. GME performs new arrangements and re-compositions with cultural inflections and instrumentation that would have been alien to the Mediterranean and Balkan Ottoman communities from which these songs stem. This decision to introduce old songs into new contexts is based on the means and aims underlying most of my composing and show-creation, summarized in this 3C framework (inspired by Dr. Devin Naar):

GME's 3C's:

Through efficacy in **Craft**, we move people.

By moving people we inspire personal **Connection**.

Connection impacts **Consciousness**, adding perspectives to questions about events we experience.

Why This Matters

- Sustained, deepened inquiry strengthens awareness of our own and of others' often-tacit assumptions about how we relate to the world and to one another.
- Once we have heard someone's story and understand more about how they have arrived at their beliefs and viewpoints, it becomes more difficult to dismiss/dehumanize them, even when we sharply disagree.

Over time, this increases informed agency in **Choices** we make.

The process is dynamic and multi-directional.

As Tim Shriver, co-founder and board chair of the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, puts it, “Emotion drives attention and attention drives learning... People learn when their heart is open, engaged, connected and filled with purpose.”

Judith Cohen from York University points out that recognition of a new, and different, interpretation of a traditional song does not automatically diminish that interpretation’s beauty or impact. If I have done my job sufficiently well, you may indeed be moved by this performance. But if you are not, the blame is wholly on me, and not on the vast, rich traditions of Ottoman Jewish song by which I am inspired.

— *Guy Mendilow*



PERSONAL CONNECTIONS

1. *The Forgotten Kingdom* shares a family's story through stories and images in a curated book of memory, like a scrapbook. For what reasons are family stories important? What can they tell us about who we are? If you were to make your own Book of Memory, what three stories would you include to explain why you are who you are?
2. *The Forgotten Kingdom* is about moments of great change in a family's life. What is a moment in your life that marked a major turning point? What choices and chances did you take that set you on the path that you are now on?
3. *The Forgotten Kingdom* offers an immersive experience of a family's memories by using the tools of music, sand animation and the spoken word. What moves you in the ways these stories are told, and for what reasons does this matter? There are so many tools to tell a story: cooking, words, dance, music, visual arts of myriad forms...Were you to tell a story from your family, what tools would you choose to make it come alive vividly and vibrantly?

BIOGRAPHIES

The Guy Mendilow Ensemble (GME)

Guy Mendilow Ensemble (GME) weaves moving stories through riveting scores, narration and theatrically projected sand animation. GME productions center on true tales of people's choices and chances as they navigate thresholds, whether personal or historical. GME is especially intrigued by decisions of generosity and grace despite upheaval.

With the leadership of artistic director/composer Guy Mendilow, GME's team is "*an international tour de force*" (Bethlehem Morning Call) of world-class artists, writers, composers and theatrical designers from the Middle East, Europe, South and North America now living mainly in Boston, MA and New York, NY.

GME operates on the conviction that moving, multidisciplinary stories can be powerful agents for conversation: A coming together to listen to one another and share our stories in the service of exploring who we are and who we wish to be, building an understanding of how the other has come to see what they see, believe what they believe and know what they know. When equipped with well-crafted questions —fueled by genuine curiosity and inviting honesty, dignity and aliveness —conversation promotes a willingness to be vulnerable; to be surprised; to NOT have quick answers; to suspend assumptions; to probe ambiguity. Conversation is not necessarily about agreement, or common ground on specific issues, other than the meta-issue that we are humans worthy of being heard and understood.

GME is a recipient of multiple funding awards from the **National Endowment for the Arts**, **The Boston Foundation**, the **New England Foundation for the Arts** and **Western Arts Alliance** on the basis of artistry, cultural preservation and the strengthening of communities through the arts. GME was founded in 2004.





Chris Baum — Violin

CHRIS BAUM is a contemporary violinist, composer, and educator who *“ushers the violin into fresh sonic territory”* (NPR). A pioneer of modern string technique, his strength lies in his versatility, consistently pushing boundaries while molding his playing to fit ensembles and genres often deemed unsuitable for the instrument. The Boston Globe calls him “viciously talented... teemed with color and creativity.” Trained in a demanding classical environment, Baum expanded his musical vocabulary at Berklee College of Music, where he graduated with honors with a degree in film scoring and composition. Baum’s list of credits includes collaborations with Bent Knee, The Dear Hunter, Leprous, Ben Levin, Thirty Seconds to Mars, Amanda Palmer, Dropkick Murphys, Richard Henshall, Symmetry, Art Decade, Jherek Bischoff, and the Video Game Orchestra. Chris Baum joined GME in 2014.

Photo: Jonathan Tadiello



Andy Bergman — Woodwinds, Jaw harps, Thumb Pianos

Grounded in classical technique, multi-instrumentalist ANDY BERGMAN's musicality is informed by work with a wide range of ensembles, from orchestras and musical theater pits to bands playing rock, folk, afropop, and reggae. Bergman has toured extensively in Europe and North Africa with the poet/singer Iyeoka, and appeared at countless festival and club stages across the US and Canada. He contributed sound design to Kinodance's modern dance work "Denizen", and has composed horn arrangements for various artists including: Iyeoka, Aloud, Dammien Alexander, and The Doped Up Dollies. Other credits include ongoing collaborations with Kotoko Brass, Sawaari, The Macrotones, and Flying Vipers. Andy Bergman has been with GME since 2004.

Photo: Eric Antoniou



Alison James — Script Co-Writer

ALISON JAMES has been writing and translating books for children since 1990, when her first novel, *Sing for a Gentle Rain* came out to awards and rave reviews. Since then she has published a novel, two picture books, and translated over 150 books for children. Her latest will be published by Neal Porter in 2023. James' awards include the highest honor for fiction award (Society of School Librarians International), Young Adults Choice selection (Children's Book Council/International Reading Association), Book for the Teen Age honour (New York Public Library) and the Christopher Medal for translation of *The Rainbow Fish*. James has lived around the world, Japan, Norway, Germany, Sweden, Taiwan and Pakistan. In 1992, she founded *Kindling Words* with Mary Lee Donovan (Candlewick.) Alison James and her husband run a forest school for young wizards, and live in a grass-roofed cottage in Vermont.

Photo: Anika Wistar Jones



Seághan McKay — Theatrical Projection Design, Scenic Design

SEÁGHAN MCKAY is a Boston-based projection designer, production manager, and educator. His projection design work has been showcased in many of Boston's premiere performance venues, including The Boston Opera House, The Shubert Theater, Boston Symphony Hall, The Paramount Theatre and The Huntington Avenue Theatre. McKay's designs have earned him six award nominations from the Independent Reviewers of New England. McKay received the 2017 IRNE Award for Best Projection Design for the Lyric Stage production of Sondheim on Sondheim and the 2018 IRNE Award for Best Projection Design for the New Repertory Theatre production of Golda's Balcony. Highlights include The Boston Ballet Swan Lake, The Boston Lyric Opera La Boheme, The Flying Dutchman, The Boston Pops Gershwin Spectacular: Promenade, SpeakEasy Stage Company Big Fish, Carrie: the Musical, Next To Normal, Nine, Striking 12, [title of show], and Jerry Springer: The Opera, Florida Rep Best of Enemies, TheatreSquared All The Way, Merrimack Repertory Theater The Heath, Little Orphan Danny, Memory House. A full-time faculty member at the Boston University School of Theater since 2014, McKay lectures and leads master classes at universities across the US, from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Brandeis University and Emerson College to The University of Arkansas, and the Production Managers Forum Fall 2012 Meeting. He is a proud member of United Scenic Artists, IATSE Local USA 829, which represents theatrical designers and scenic artists across the United States.

Photo: Leslie Chiu



Photo: Elizabeth Friar Photography

Guy Mendilow — Artistic Director; Voice, Guitar, Berimbau
GUY MENDILOW was raised in an academic immigrant family prioritizing continuous learning, disciplined curiosity and improving others' lives. His love of music and story reflects his family's multi-generational fascination with the unspoken ways we make meaning of an ambiguous world around us. "These are the stories we unknowingly tell ourselves about ourselves and the ways we relate to what surrounds us," Mendilow says. "These stories are like the air we breathe: Most often they go undetected." Like his family, Mendilow is tantalized by ways of listening that bring these stories, and the values embedded in them, to the attentional surface. His work is first and foremost to listen, and then to strive to refract these stories' emotional landscapes.

A citizen of Israel, UK and USA, Mendilow began performing at age 10, touring internationally and domestically with the American Boychoir, singing 200+ concerts a year in venues from Carnegie Hall and Boston Symphony Hall to churches in remote rural communities. These formative years nurtured Mendilow's love of immersive vocal harmonies and theatres. They also showed him how high youth can rise when properly respected and supported by adults, a principle underlying Mendilow's relationship with children in his professional and personal life.

Mendilow's pedagogical expertise is in **Dalcroze Education**: a dynamic approach to training musicianship through purposeful movement in a celebratory, social atmosphere rich in improvisation. He is a candidate for the highest Dalcroze credential achievable in the USA.

Alongside producing and directing GME's shows, Mendilow leads social/civic-practice residencies, story/listening circles, lectures and choral collaborations cultivating long-lasting connections between performing arts organizations and communities, from juvenile rehabilitation centers and K-12 schools to university campuses. He has been a residency artist with Celebrity Series of Boston since 2014 and serves as part of Celebrity Series' Community Engagement Committee. The Association of Performing Arts Professionals featured his "from the ground-up" framework for residency design.



Keita Ogawa — Percussion

Hailing originally from Sasebo city, Nagasaki, Japan, KEITA OGAWA is a two-time Grammy nominee and Grammy Award winner and one of the most versatile and sought-after percussionist and drummer in New York City. Ogawa's drumming career began at age 15 with regular Tokyo performances. He was accepted into the prestigious Berklee College of Music where he studied with legendary musicians and educators Manuel "Egui" Castrillo, Jamey Haddad, Tito De Gracia, David Rosado, and Mark Walker. Ogawa works with Snarky Puppy, Bokanté, Banda Magda, Yo Yo Ma, the Assad Brothers, Clarice Assad, Golijov, Charlie Hunter, the Boston Symphony Orchestra and Chicago Symphony Orchestra among others and was named Ambassador of Tourism of his Hometown, Sasebo, Nagasaki, Japan. Keita Ogawa has worked with GME since 2009.

Photo: Meinl Percussion

A close-up portrait of Karen Perlow, a woman with dark hair, wearing glasses and smiling. She is wearing a patterned scarf and blue earrings. The background is dark.

Karen Perlow — Lighting Design

KAREN PERLOW has designed over 200 productions including work at: Boston Symphony Orchestra, Merrimack Rep, Speakeasy Stage, Lyric Stage Company, Actors' Shakespeare Project, Central Square Theater, New Rep, Boston Playwrights' Theater, and Shakespeare & Company. Karen has taught Lighting Design at MIT and Northeastern University and has been a guest designer at several New England colleges and universities. She is proud to serve as the treasurer of the Theater Community Benevolent Fund. She is the recipient of three IRNE Awards for Best Lighting Design, and a NYC SOLO Fest Award in 2013. Karen is a proud member of United Scenic Artists, IATSE Local USA 829, which represents theatrical designers and scenic artists across the United States. Karen has worked with GME since 2021.

A photograph of Mike Rivard, a bassist, playing a double bass. He is wearing a dark shirt and is focused on his instrument. The background is dark with some blurred lights, suggesting a stage or club setting.

Mike Rivard — Basses, Sintir

Bassist MIKE RIVARD finds himself at home in an array of settings: From the low-rock of Mark Sandman and Morphine, to the mountains of Morocco with local Berber musicians, with side trips into the Broadway pits of *The Lion King* and *Wicked*, and sessions with Medeski Martin & Wood. After graduating from the Berklee College of Music and mentoring with Jazz legend Dave Holland, Rivard picked up the Moroccan sintir (three-stringed bass lute), under the tutelage of Hassan Hakmoun and Maalem Mahmoud Guinia. Rivard puts his instrumentation and knowledge to use in Club d’Elf, a jazz-world-dub-electronica collective he founded. Club D’Elf collaborators include John Medeski, Mark Sandman, Hassan Hakmoun, Ryan Montbleau, Marc Ribot, DJ Logic, and Marco Benevento. Rivard is a member of the Indo-jazz group Natraj, the Duke Levine Group, the Boston Pops Orchestra and is a founding member of Sawaari, whose music explores the nexus of Indian taals, Arabic maqams, and trance music from North Africa and Italy. Mike Rivard has worked with GME since 2016.

Photo: Michael J. Spencer



Kseniya Simonova — Sand Animation

Winner of Ukraine's Got Talent (with 40 million+ views for her semifinal video), and Golden Buzzer winner on both America's Got Talent: The Champions and Britain's Got Talent: The Champions, KSENIYA SIMONOVA has astonished audiences in over 40 countries with her remarkable sand storytelling.

Simonova developed her sand animation technique by sifting volcanic sand through her hands over a lightboard. During her performances she creates, obliterates and morphs her images to create a flowing narrative.

She is a graduate of the Artistic School of Yevpatoria, the Tavrida National V.I. Vernadsky University and the Ukrainian Academy of Printing. In 2009, she catapulted into international fame when she won Ukraine's Got Talent — an unexpected victory for a humble artist who had no expectations of grandeur. Unlike more upbeat competition entries, Simonova felt compelled to use sand to tell the story of Germany's destruction of Ukraine during World War II, as experienced through the eyes of a young couple.

Since then, Simonova has been featured on Eurovision, has recorded with artists from Esperanza Spalding to the YouTube Orchestra and is invited to share her stories before presidents, heads of states and royalty. Simonova lives and works in Yevpatoria, Ukraine. Kseniya Simonova and GME have collaborated since 2017.

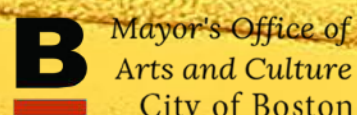
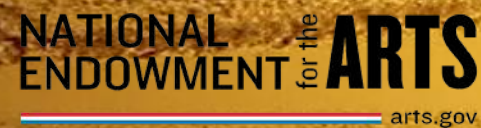


Sofía Tosello — Voice

From Córdoba, Argentina, vocalist SOFÍA TOSELLO draws on her expertise in Latin American Cancion traditions like Tango, Chacarera, Bolero, Son and Zamba to bring GME vocals alive with bold colours. Part of an exciting group of young transnational artists advancing change in Latin American song, Tosello performs and records worldwide with artists like Latin Grammy Winner Pedro Giraudo, Horacio “El Negro” Hernández, Glamour Tango and Polly Ferman, Marta Gomez, among others. She is a teaching artist at performing arts organizations like NY’s Carnegie Hall and Webop Music Program at Jazz at Lincoln Center and has been on the music faculties of Reed College, Swarnaboohmi Academy of Music in Chennai, India and New Jersey City University, where she is currently a professor of Jazz vocal studies. Sofia Tosello has been with GME since 2012.



GRANT AWARDS FROM THESE FUNDERS HAVE GENEROUSLY SUPPORTED GME'S TOURING & PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT



The Designers at this Theatre are Represented by
United Scenic Artists • Local USA 829
of the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees

SUPPORT OUR WORK

The Guy Mendilow Ensemble is a project of Arts & Business Council of Greater Boston, Inc., a 501(c)(3) non-profit tax-exempt organization. Contributions in support of Guy Mendilow Ensemble are greatly appreciated and may be made electronically at [Arts & Business Council of Greater Boston, Inc.](http://Arts & Business Council of Greater Boston, Inc) All contributions are fully deductible to the extent allowed by law.

www.guymendilowensemble.com

[Back to Index](#)