

April 4, 2025

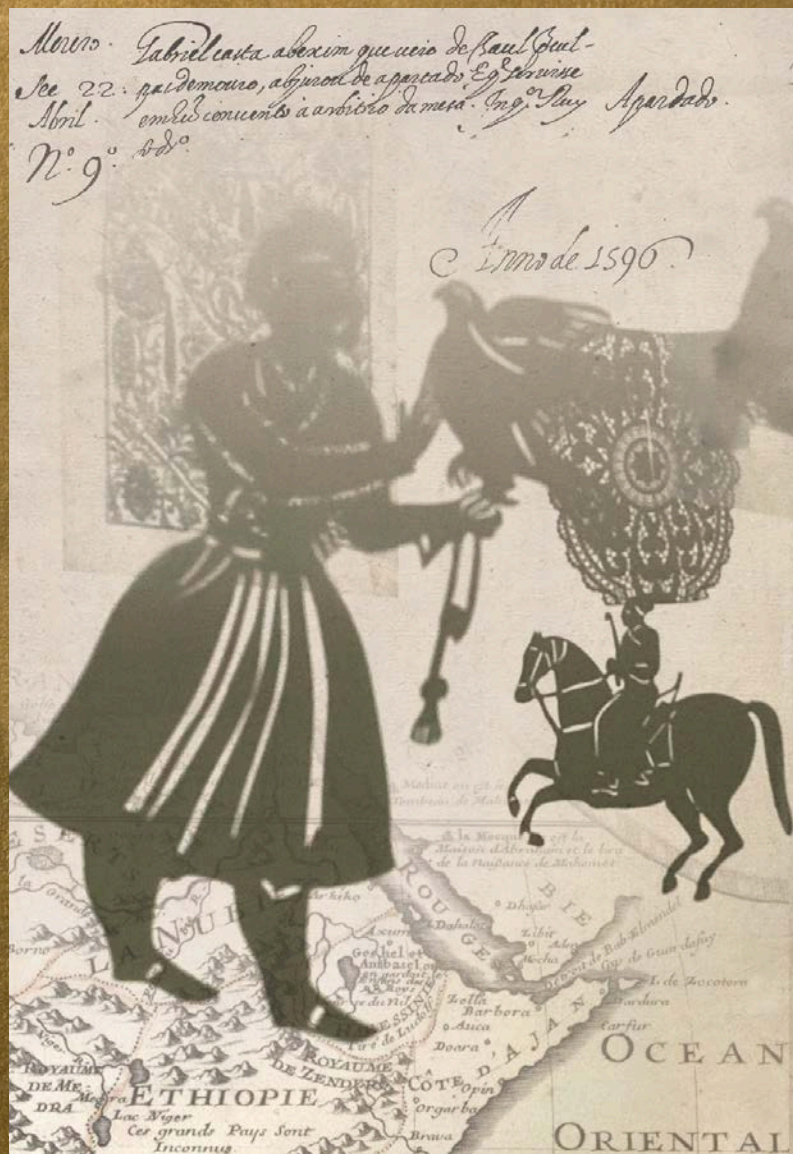
Yale Luce Hall, 34 Hillhouse Ave, 7.30pm

Yale MacMillan Center, Yale Council on African Studies, Yale Institute of Sacred and Music Beyond Borders
present

Gabriel's Odyssey

by the Kukutana
Ensemble

founded by Janie Cole



A Musical and Visual Narrative of Slavery, Conversion, Persecution,
and Resilience from a 16th-Century Indian Ocean World

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The Story: 'Gabriel Abexim'

(based on the earliest-known autobiography by an Ethiopian slave)



Gabriel was a Beta Israel Ethiopian Jew, who was kidnapped as a young child from the Ethiopian Highlands and sold into slavery in the Arab world in the mid 16th century. After two decades of enslavement in Arabia where he converted to Islam and took the name Alihan, he was sold again and found himself in the Ahmadnagar Sultanate in India where he served Mullah Mohammad as a stable boy for many years. Mistreated by his master, their relations soured further when Gabriel got involved with a Moorish woman Misha Cobar. The lovers fled to the Estado da India and reached Portuguese Chaul where they found refuge with the Dominican priests of Our Lady of Guadalupe, converted to Christianity and found domestic employment in the house of a Christian woman of Abyssinian caste. Only two months later, Gabriel fled back to the uncertainty of Ahmadnagar and reinvented himself again as a Muslim for the next six years, then went back to Chaul where he came to the attention of the Inquisition. He was imprisoned in Chaul and deported to Goa to face two trials as a relapsed Muslim.

Gabriel's Odyssey is an Afro-Indian story of slavery, mobility, persecution, love and resistance, which offers rare views into the early modern Indian Ocean World (IOW): enslavement on the Ethiopian Highlands, slave trading in the Arab world, Habshi life through the porous borders of the Indo-Portuguese frontier, and religious persecution in Portuguese India. It appears to be the earliest surviving autobiographical account by an enslaved Ethiopian, yet represents a universal story of oppression, migration and refashioning like the experiences of countless other early modern Africans across the Indian Ocean World. Gabriel transited through interconnected African, Arab and Indian worlds, as a Jew, a Muslim and a Christian, in a 16th-century global life history of forced labor, abuse, surveillance and resilience in disparate locales of the Indian Ocean. Despite his African identity, Gabriel exploited the opportunities for mobility and conversion through active agency that the region's borders offered to emancipate himself from multiple experiences of oppression. It is the rare life history of a non-elite Habshi slave as told by himself, in an interplay of his Beta Israel ancestry, his stated religious affiliations and the consequences of his perceived African identity and status.

About Gabriel's Odyssey

Gabriel's Odyssey is an innovative musical and visual narrative which brings to life the earliest surviving biography of a 16th-century Ethiopian slave in a sumptuous imaginary of the early modern sound- and visualsapes of Ethiopia, Arabia and India, combining music, poetry and visual artistic effects in a rich and moving performance. Reconstructed from surviving archival records from a 16th-century trial held by the Goan Inquisition, Gabriel's Odyssey tells the story of Gabriel, a Beta Israel Jew in Ethiopia, who was kidnapped as a child and became swept up by the slave trade in the Arab world for two decades where he converted to Islam, was transported by a slave trader to Western India where he tried to improve his life through Christian conversion and relocation, and then came to the attention of the Goan Inquisition as a relapsed Muslim, finally being sentenced to forced labor in the galleys of Goa. Told through the imaginary soundscapes, visuals and voices of an early modern Indian Ocean World, Gabriel's life represents a universal story of faith, oppression, migration and refashioning like the experiences of countless other early modern Africans.

Always aware of his African identity, Gabriel nonetheless exploited the opportunities he found in each new place and through active agency he strove to improve his circumstances, reaching towards a greater degree of freedom to build a life with the woman he loved, herself a slave, and to emancipate himself from multiple experiences of oppression. His odyssey is the rare life history of a non-elite Habshi slave as told by himself through his multiple guises to his inquisitors, in an interplay of his Beta Israel ancestry, his inner struggles with his faith and adopted religions, and the consequences of his perceived African identity and status. It gives historical granularity to the accounts of the seafaring journeys and adventures in the Indian Ocean World given by such travelers as Ibn Battuta, and storytellers, such as Captain Buzurg Ibn Shahriyar, the supposed author of a collection of sailors' tales, Book of the Wonders of India, that became primary sources for research into Indian Ocean voyages in the pre-colonial era.

The performance is part of the virtual international and interdisciplinary conference on "The Black Indian Ocean: Slavery, Religion, and Expressive Cultures (1400-1700)," on April 2-3, 2025, organized by Dr. Janie Cole (University of Connecticut) in collaboration with Yale MacMillan Center, Yale Council on African Studies, and Yale Institute of Sacred Music.

Timeline and Synopsis of Gabriel's Odyssey

This timeline reconstructs Gabriel's story from his trial testimony (based on Giuseppe Marcocci (2012), Ananya Chakravarti (2019), Matteo Salvatore (2020), and Mark Aranha (forthcoming)), spliced with a chronology of important historical events in the 16th-century Ahmadnagar Sultanate. Our performance of Gabriel's Odyssey is rooted in this newly-researched contextualisation of Gabriel's story within the political turbulence of his environment by Mark Aranha (forthcoming).

Gabriel's Odyssey begins with Gabriel at age 40 years old rowing in a Portuguese galley in forced labor, remembering the events of his life.

1537

Burhan Nizam Shah (Burhan I) changes the official faith of Ahmadnagar to Shi'ism, deeply impressed with the teachings of the Persian Imam Shah Tahir, who was present in the Deccan under taqiyya, hiding his Shia faith. The state insignia are changed from white to green, and the names of the Caliphs are replaced with the names of the Imams. Thousands of people take the King's new faith, from courtiers and amirs to farrash and slaves. Under the guidance of the brilliant and benevolent Shah Tahir, the state prospers.

1555

Gabriel is born a Beta Israel Jew on the Ethiopian Highlands in a village in the Semien Mountains.

Early 1560s

Gabriel is kidnapped as a young child by Ethiopian Christian slave traders and sold into slavery in the Arab world. He is probably taken by slave traders from Massawa to the slave markets at Mocha, Aden or Zebid.

1564

Murtaza Nizam Shah ascends the throne in Ahmadnagar, taking over from Husain I, the son of Burhan I. The next 24 years are considered the zenith of the Ahmadnagar Sultanate, with political stability and relatively peaceful relations with its domestic and foreign neighbours.



1582

After spending around 20 years in Arabia, raised a Muslim and possibly working as a domestic slave, Gabriel is sold again. He finds himself in Muslim Chaul, the biggest port of the Ahmadnagar Sultanate in India. By this time, Shi'ism had been the state religion for 45 years and many of the important positions in court are occupied by the Foreigners (a collective term for elite migrants from the Persian Gulf).

Gabriel is sold by a saudāgar (merchant), Jamal, to work as a farrash (stable boy) for Mullah Mohammad in the city of Ahmadnagar. Mistreated and abused by his master, Gabriel's relations with the Mullah sour. He meets and falls in love with a Dakhni woman Misha Cobar.

1588

The ruler of Ahmadnagar, Murtaza Nizam Shah eventually loses his mind and is murdered by his own 16-year-old son, Miran Hussain. Hussain is now made Nizam Shah but is manipulated by his advisor Mirza Khan, a Dakhni with his own ambitions.

June 1589

Hussain is imprisoned by Mirza Khan and Ismail, the 12-year-old son of Murtaza's brother, Burhan, is made Nizam Shah of Ahmadnagar. Jamal Khan, a Dakhni general and staunch Mahdavi, is enraged by this and kills Mirza Khan. With the support of the Habshis, he removes all Foreigners from the court and orders the Foreigners to be slaughtered in their homes. In this carnage, a thousand people are killed in the capital, mostly Shia Foreigners and their slaves. Jamal Khan abolishes Shi'ism as the state religion and turns Ahmadnagar into a center for the Mahdavi faith.

1589

Around this time, Gabriel and Misha seek refuge in the Estado da India in Portuguese Chaul with the Dominican priests of Our Lady of Guadalupe. Though Gabriel makes no mention of this, it is likely that Mullah Mohammad and perhaps Gabriel himself were attacked in the massacre. Gabriel and Misha convert to Christianity and are taken into domestic employment in the home of an Ethiopian Christian woman. Side Acrodo, a powerful figure in the Ethiopian Christian community of Chaul, opposes his marriage to Misha.

1589

The imposition of the Mahdavi faith offends the Foreigners, Dakhnis and Habshis alike across the Deccan. A regional revolt against Jamal begins to form, led by Muhammad Khan of Berar. Jamal Khan, with the young king Ismail, takes his troops and advances toward his enemies.

1589

After only two months in Portuguese Chaul, and perhaps hearing of the impending revolt against Jamal Khan and his imposition of the Mahdavi faith, Gabriel returns to Ahmadnagar alone, where he quickly reintegrates into the Muslim community as Alihan and lives there for the next six years.

1591

Burhan II becomes the Nizam Shah of Ahmadnagar after finally defeating Jamal Khan. He annuls the Mahdavi doctrine and restores the Shia faith to Ahmadnagar.

Early 1595

Burhan II is ill and must ensure that his son Ismail (the Mahdavi) does not succeed him. He nominates his elder son Ibrahim (Shia, and coincidentally half Habshi) to be king and orders the execution of his younger son Ismail. Ikhlas Khan, a Habshi amir, hears of this order and to disrupt it, spreads a rumour that the king has died and the Foreigners are to be massacred again. Many of them flee. Ikhlas Khan leads the Habshis and Dakhnis against Burhan, but despite his ill health, Burhan wins the battle and drives them out.

March 1595

Now forty years old, perhaps hearing the rumors of another massacre of the Foreigners and knowing he is in danger again, Gabriel flees towards Portuguese Chaul to seek refuge. But as he crosses into the Estado, Gabriel encounters a Portuguese soldier who escorts him to the local Goa Inquisition. After being interrogated, Gabriel is deported to the Sabaio Palace in Goa with its notorious prison.

At his first trial, Gabriel pleads that he only just came to his senses and wishes again to be a Christian. He is sentenced to serve in the monastery of Santo Tomás, run by the Order of São Domingos. In the distance, death row inmates are being marched off to the execution site at the Campo de São Lazaro wearing their penitential robes emblazoned with images of flames and demons.

April 1595

Burhan II dies and Ibrahim succeeds him. After Ibrahim is killed, Mian Majnu advises that Ahmed, a 12-year-old thought to be descended from the Nizam Shahi line, should be king. Chand Bibi, a well-loved figure supported by all, opposes this and makes her way to Ahmadnagar to assume the regency, supporting the nomination of the infant Bahadur.

15 Aug 1595

Gabriel escapes the monastery of Santo Tomás and heads East in a bid to cross into the Ahmadnagar Sultanate to live as a Muslim again. With Chand Bibi as regent, the Shias would be back in favor in Ahmadnagar. However, Gabriel is arrested on the outskirts of Goa.

15 Aug 1595

Young Ahmed is named Nizam Shah as Chand Bibi is betrayed by the Habshis and captured by Mian Majnu in Ahmadnagar.

Sept 1595

Gabriel's second trial opens: he is charged with being a relapsed sinner, found guilty of "culpas de mouro" (guilty of being a Moor) and sentenced to forced labor in the galleys of Goa. No more is known of his fate.



Story-telling, Representation and Decolonization

Gabriel's Odyssey is based on rigorous new multidisciplinary research by a team of scholar-artists from South Africa, Ethiopia, India and UK (see bios below), many of whom worked on the Mellon-funded interdisciplinary research, mapping and archiving project at the University of Cape Town, the University of the Witwatersrand, the University of the Western Cape, and Ambedkar University (Delhi) in collaboration with Addis Ababa University, Dar es Salaam University and Eduardo Mondlane University, entitled "Re-Centring AfroAsia: Musical and Human Migrations in the Pre-Colonial Period 700-1500AD."

The basis of Gabriel's story is taken from the reconstructions in Matteo Salvatore (2020), Giuseppe Marcocci (2012), Ananya Chakravarti (2019), Patricia Souza de Faria (2016), and Mark Aranha (forthcoming), based on a manuscript source from the Inquisition Archive in Lisbon, 1595 mss. copy of proceedings of trial...Tribunal do Santo Oficio of the Inquisicao de Lisboa entitled "Processo de Gabriel casta abexim que veio de Chaul remetido a esta mesa," file number 4937. His biography has been positioned and re-imagined in the wider framework of the latest studies on the early modern Indian Ocean World in the fields of history, musicology, ethnomusicology, sociology, art history, anthropology and archaeology. One aim behind Gabriel's Odyssey is to explore artistic ways of experimenting with and reworking archival sources, and decolonizing the stories of Africans that emerge out of colonial archives, such as the Inquisition Archive in Lisbon. Without the colonial records and surviving manuscripts documenting his trials by the Goan Inquisition, Gabriel's biography would have been lost forever, like those of countless other Africans from this period. However, his story and voice are recorded through the Inquisition's notary and a translator, adding further colonial layers to the version of his life history that has survived. Gabriel's Odyssey strives to recast Gabriel in our imagined construction of his own voice, drawing on available historical and literary sources that enrich our sense of the lives of people living in his world. Thus, we attempt to give him back his agency and enormous capacity for resistance, without ever downplaying the brutal inhumane violence and everlasting damage of the conditions of early modern slavery or claiming that our version of his life story represents a historically accurate 'truth,' aside from drawing on the scant sources that exist.

Soundscales

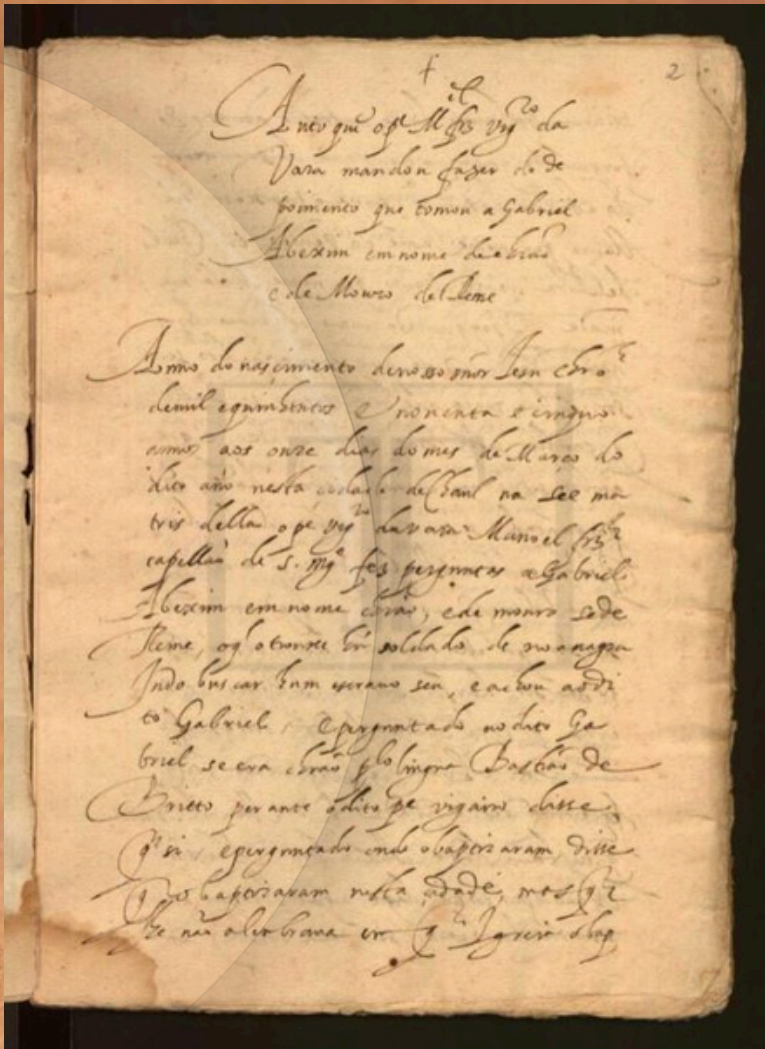
The musical compositional process is rooted in our collaborative research into the music, poetry, and scripture of the different communities that Gabriel comes across in his journey across the early modern Indian Ocean World. Drawing inspiration from Ethiopian zēmā, the canticles of the Beta Israel, Gujarati mawlud, Konkani mando to Gregorian chant and Sufi-Bhakti abhang, we work across indigenous instruments and languages to bring imaginary soundscapes and musical textures from Gabriel's story to life. While there is much we cannot know about his past, we fill these historical and musical gaps with our personal artistic interpretations and new compositions that reflect the diverse heritage of the Kukutana Ensemble musicians and guest musicians.

Visualscales

The artworks form an intellectual inquiry into an imagined Indian Ocean aesthetic, as an alternative to a Western ocularcentric tradition. An Indian Ocean aesthetic draws on scholars' theorizing of a 'perceptual culture,' that is a multisensory realm and Sufi Islam, which forms one such alternative to Western constructs of 'Art'. Perceptual culture is a sensual engagement with sound, touch, taste, scent, and can be extended to include dreams, the confluence of interior and exterior spaces. The artists drew inspiration from 10th-century Arabic, African and other contemporaneous inquiries into astronomy, astrology, optics, geometry and alchemy. In these manuscripts, science and art work together with music to locate unseen currents of history. The experimental process of creating this visual imaginary of Gabriel's worlds as an artist-researcher forms part of a broader decolonial endeavor.



Script



The written records of Gabriel's life were produced by his inquisitors, and therefore are not reliable indicators of his past life or his state of mind at the time that he was subjected to the Inquisition – what he told the Inquisition may have been tailored to what he thought would protect him best from their condemnation. To depict him as a man with agency over his own inner life – his identity, his understanding of his experiences, his way of making sense of the many different worlds in which he found himself, Karen Press and Ari Sitas drew on source materials that could give a sense of the physical and emotional realities of the world he was born into, and the life of an African slave in Arabia and India, including histories of Ethiopian religious life in the 14th-16th centuries, accounts of

the capture and enslavement of a group of Oromo children in the 19th century, studies of slavery in the Indian Ocean World in the pre-colonial period, anthologies of contemporary Ethiopian Amharic poetry, early modern travel narratives about Ethiopia, Arabia and India, biographies of people living in Deccan Sultanates, and Sufi-inspired poetry and aesthetics.

The Kukutana Ensemble and Guests

The Kukutana Ensemble (founded by Janie Cole) comprises a remarkable array of master musicians, composers, artists and writers from Ethiopia, India, UK and South Africa, with guest artists from USA, Iran and Palestine.

Mark Aranha: composer, guitarist

Nariman Assadi (guest musician): tombak, daf

Hansini Bhasker (guest musician): voice

Grasella Luigi Bonefeni: voice, violin, composer

Bronwen Clacherty: composer, voice, vibraphone, uhadi

Janie Cole: voice

Tesfamichael Yayeh Hussen: composer, voice, masinqo, krar, washint

Conor Ralphs: visual artist

Cara Stacey: composer, piano, budongo lamellophone, bows, voice, umtshingo, nyunga-nyunga

Kristy Stone: visual artist

Zafer Tawil (guest musician): qanun, oud, voice, ney



About the Kukutana Ensemble

The Kukutana* Ensemble was launched in 2021 by Dr. Janie Cole (University of Connecticut) out of the University of Cape Town's Mellon Foundation Re-Centring AfroAsia Project to develop live performances and digital recordings rooted in new repertoires of East African music and its historical links to an Indian Ocean World soundscape dating from the 8th-to the 17th centuries. These innovative musical narratives combine music, poetry and visual effects, to explore core research themes on the indigenous and pre-colonial communities and musical cultures of Kenya, Lamu, Mozambique, Tanzania, Madagascar, Zanzibar, the Swahili coast, and Ethiopia, and their historical relations to the Indian Ocean World. They provide insights into the movement of peoples, civilizations and cultures through the impact of war, slavery, trade routes, religion, and aesthetic constellations around ports, polities and kingdoms, in order to explore wider themes of musical and human migrations, transcultural encounters, displacement, identity, faith, religion, and cross-cultural exchanges between East Africa and the Indian Ocean World, including Arabia, Southern India, South East Asia, and Southern Europe.

* The name 'Kukutana' comes from the Swahili word meaning literally 'to meet' (related to 'kukabiliana', to encounter)

Founder/Executive Director

Janie Cole (voice) is Assistant Professor of Musicology at the University of Connecticut and a Research Affiliate of the Council on African Studies at Yale University. In 2023/24, she was a Research Scholar at Yale University's Institute of Sacred Music and Visiting Professor in Yale's Department of Music. Prior to this, she was a Senior Lecturer (adjunct) at the University of Cape Town's South African College of Music (2015-23). She is RAA Research Officer for East Africa (2018-) and a Research Associate at Stanford University's Center for Computer Research in Music and Acoustics (2022-), specializing in musical culture in the Christian Kingdom of Ethiopia and transcultural encounters with Latin Europe and the early modern Indian Ocean World; Italian music, poetry and theatrical spectacle in the late Renaissance and early Baroque periods; and 20th-century South African music, protest and prisoner resistance during the anti-apartheid struggle. She is the founding Renaissance Society of America Discipline Representative in Africana Studies (2019-23), co-founder of the International Musicological Society's Early African Sound Worlds Study Group, and the founder/executive director of Music Beyond Borders (www.musicbeyondborders.net).

Scholar Artists

Mark Aranha (composer, guitarist) is an Indian musician and PhD candidate at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. His ongoing research on the melodies of the Mappila Muslims of Malabar continues from his MMus (2021) work on Jewish and Mappila histories and song traditions in Kerala, studied in the context of pre-colonial transoceanic migrations and networks of exchange. He has presented his work at major musicology and ethnology conferences and lectured at universities in India and Taiwan. Beyond academia, Mark also has over a decade of experience working across geographic and stylistic boundaries as a composer, sideman and producer with musical artists such as Sumangala Damodaran (IN), Susmit Sen (IN), Thandeka Mfinyongo (RSA), Lindokuhle Matina (RSA), Cara Stacey (RSA), Bianca Love (USA), and many others. His research and musical practice come together in original productions such as *Ife and Bilal* (2018), *Gabriel's Odyssey* (2021, 2025), and *Rebecca: Oru Kochini Kadhapadaal* (2022).

Nariman Assadi (tombak, daf) is an Iranian musician from Tehran. At the age of thirteen, he began studying Tombak under Master Amir Mogharab Samadi. From 2008 to 2013, Nariman performed at Vahdat Hall as a soloist and with the Persian Percussion Ensemble at Pars Academy, the premier music academy for children. After mastering Tombak, he then began learning Daf under the great Master Bijan Kamkar. With a strong understanding of the Daf and Tombak, Nariman started learning Barbat (Oud) under Master Mohammad Firouzi. In 2015, Nariman emigrated to the United States where he began his professional music career by performing and attending festivals. Along with being a member of various ensembles, Nariman is a certified-Orff teacher and teaches Daf, Tombak, and Music for children. In 2022, he toured all over the United States with Afra Ensemble, led by Master Hossein Behrouzina. Additionally, Nariman released his first album *Larzanah, Improvisation of Iranian Folk Music*, with Master Faraj Alipour on vocals and Kamancheh. Currently, he teaches Iranian Music at Farsi Schools in Sacramento and the Bay Area (www.narimanpercussion.com).



Hansini Bhasker (voice) is a Tamil multi-genre vocalist, instrumentalist, composer, improviser, and scholar. Hansini deploys embodied music-making and movement for socio-ecological activism, healing, and change. She graduated Summa Cum Laude with a BA in Music from Princeton University with certificates in Vocal Performance, Cognitive Science, Entrepreneurship and Finance, and is currently pursuing Vocal Performance through an MA in Music at Wesleyan University. She is a Young Arts winner in Voice and winner of Wesleyan's Concerto Competition whose musical practice and research bridge across Western classical opera and early choral repertory, French chanson, jazz, R&B, Karnatak, Bollywood, Kazakh folk, Javanese gamelan, and experimental soundscape and extended vocal techniques. Her latest research explores cultural contrasts, evolutions and interactions in the use and control of vibration, timbre variation and pitch oscillation in vocalization.

Grasella Luigi Bonefeni (voice, violin, composer) is an Ethiopian violinist and singer. She holds a BA degree in Music and an MA in Arts in Music from Addis Ababa University's Yared School of Music. From 2008 to 2013, she worked as a music teacher at international schools, and since 2014 she has been working as a violin player and a music director of a string orchestra at the Ethiopian National Theatre.

Bronwen Clacherty (composer, voice, vibraphone, uhadi) is a lecturer in African Music at the South African College of Music, University of Cape Town. Bronwen has a Bachelor of Music from the South African College of Music, University of Cape Town and a Masters in Community and Participatory Arts from Goldsmiths College, University of London. She completed her PhD in 2021 through the South African College of Music and the Re-Centring AfroAsia Project, at the University of Cape Town. Her doctoral and current research investigates Zanzibari women's history, drawing on oral history, particularly songs and stories. Bronwen's work also explores performance and creative work as an output for research studies. Bronwen is a performing musician, recording artist and composer and has released an album titled Uyandibiza with her ensemble, The Tholakele Project, which is available on streaming platforms. She has performed as a percussionist and soloist with orchestras such as the Cape Philharmonic Orchestra and the Johannesburg Philharmonic Orchestra.

Tesfamichael Yayeh Hussen (composer, voice, masinqo, krar, washint) is a graduate assistant at Addis Ababa University's Performing and Visual Arts College and the Yared School of Music. He was a music teacher for six years at the Entoto Polytechnic College Music Department. He is a master musician of indigenous Ethiopian instruments and has wide performance experience working with the Ethiopian children and youth theater houses in live stage performances, trio groups, the Yared School of Music orchestra, and various traditional Ethiopian bands.

Conor Ralphs (visual artist) received training in Fine Arts at the Michaelis School of Art in Cape Town and a Masters degree in Art History from the University of Cape Town. His work is multi-disciplinary, including painting, photography, interactive installations and research-based interventions exploring themes of migration, astronomy and related material culture. He is the cofounder of the Africa|Nosy Art Exchange (ANAE) developed in Madagascar which seeks to encourage the interaction of artists and the exchange of ideas with the islands surrounding Africa.

Cara Stacey (composer, piano, budongo lamellophone, bows, voice, umtshingo, nyunga-nyunga) is a South African musician, composer and musicologist based in Johannesburg. She is a pianist and plays the umrhubhe, uhadi and makhoyane musical bows. She is a lecturer in Creative Music Technologies at Wits University and a former winner of the Standard Bank Young Artist for Music Award (2021). She holds a doctorate in African music, specialising in the makhoyane musical bow from Eswatini (University of Cape Town/SOAS). Cara holds a Masters in Musicology (Edinburgh), and a MMus in Performance from SOAS (London). Cara has released various albums in recent years: 'Things that grow' (Kit Records, 2015), 'Ceder' (Kit Records, 2018), 'Like the Grass' (Kit Records, 2020) and 'As in the Sun, so in the Rain' (self-released, 2021). She has performed across southern Africa, in the United Kingdom, Brazil, Peru, the USA and Switzerland with the likes of Shabaka Hutchings, Sarathy Korwar, Dan Leavers, Galina Juritz, Natalie Mason, Beat Keller, Matchume Zango, Jason Singh and Juliana Venter. She sits on the executive committee for the South African Society for Research in Music and is the International Council for Traditions of Music and Dance country liaison officer for Eswatini.

Kristy Stone (visual artist) is a practicing artist with an academic background in Fine Art (BA Hons.), Education and Heritage Studies (MA) from the University of the Witwatersrand and a PhD in Historical Studies from the University of the Western Cape (UWC), Cape Town. Her research explores the intersections of Affect and art within museum and archival collections, with a specific focus on objects of power and alternative research methods. Recently she has worked as an artist on several collaborative projects including the live art and musical performance, Ife and Bilal, stop-frame animations for A Map of Suffering, and book illustrations for Notes on an Oratorio by Ari Sitas. She is currently one of the visual artists working on Gabriel's Odyssey with the Kukutana Ensemble.

Zafer Tawil (guest musician: qanun, oud, voice, ney) is an accomplished Palestinian musician and a virtuoso on 'oud, qanun, violin, and Arab percussion. He performs across the U.S. and in the Middle East with such musicians as Sting as well as celebrated world music artists. He was a featured composer and performer in acclaimed director Jonathan Demme's Oscar-nominated film "Rachel Getting Married" and is composing and performing for Demme's next film project, Zeitoun. Zafer is continuously exploring the boundaries of Arab music, and often performs collaborative concerts involving classical Indian and Persian music, as well as Jazz fusion. He has been a guest teacher at workshops on Arab music at many institutions and universities across the United States. A native of Jerusalem, he resides in New York City.

Script Writers

Ari Sitas is a poet, writer and sociologist. Founder of the Re-Centring AfroAsia project. Author with Sumangala Damodaran of Maps of Sorrow (Tulika and Columbia University Press, 2023). Latest poetry collections Mapping Gondwana (Poetrywallah, 2023) and Surplus Values (Chimurenga 2025). Main author of the Charter for the Future of the Humanities and the Social Sciences in 2011 which was the founding text for South Africa's Creative policy. Sitas was the co-founder of the award-winning Insurrections Ensemble, the latest of which in 2024 was Must Gandhi Fall?, premiered in District Six, Cape Town. Received the Order of Mapungubwe in 2019 for his scientific and creative work by the South African Presidency and multiple other awards and chairs. He is an Emeritus Professor at the University of Cape Town and Honorary Professor at the University of Stellenbosch. He currently directs the Institute of African Alternatives.

Karen Press (poet) is a South African poet and translator. Her poetry has been published in journals and anthologies in South Africa and abroad, and she has published twelve collections of poems. Her most recent collection is *Heart's Hunger: Selected Poems* (Deep South, 2024).

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Gabriel's Odyssey program notes by Janie Cole 2025

