

The RE-CENTRING AFROASIA PROJECT

presents

GABRIEL'S ODYSSEY

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



Composed and performed by

THE KUKUTANA ENSEMBLE

30-31 October 2021

Roodebloem Studios, Cape Town



THE
ANDREW W.
MELLON
FOUNDATION



GABRIEL'S ODYSSEY

tells the 16th-century story of Gabriel, an Ethiopian Beta Israel Jew, who was abducted as a young child and sold into slavery in the Arab world, and of his woeful wanderings between faiths, love, resilience and persecution in Asia, to his final encounter with the Inquisition in Goa.

Drawing on the kaavad storytelling tradition, and imaginary and sumptuous soundscapes, visuals and voices of an early modern Indian Ocean world, Gabriel's life represents a universal story of oppression, migration and refashioning like the experiences of countless other early modern Africans.

His story, based on the earliest surviving autobiography of a 16th-century Ethiopian slave as historically reconstructed by Matteo Salvatore from surviving archival records, challenges new ways of thinking about the past and creates a long-lost sonic landscape that allows dialogue and interplay between distinct AfroAsian musical and visual traditions.

KUKUTANA ENSEMBLE

founded by Janie Cole, comprises a remarkable array of master musicians, composers, artists and writers from South Africa, India, Ethiopia and Tanzania, who worked together through the waves of the pandemic.

MARK ARANHA | composer, guitarist

NEELAMBARI BHATTACHARYA | voice/narrator

BRONWEN CLACHERTY | composer, voice, vibraphone, uhadi

JANIE COLE | founder/executive director, voice

KATHYAYINI DASH | composer, voice, artist, words and script

TESFAMICHAEL YAYEH HUSSEN | composer, voice, masinqo, krar, washint

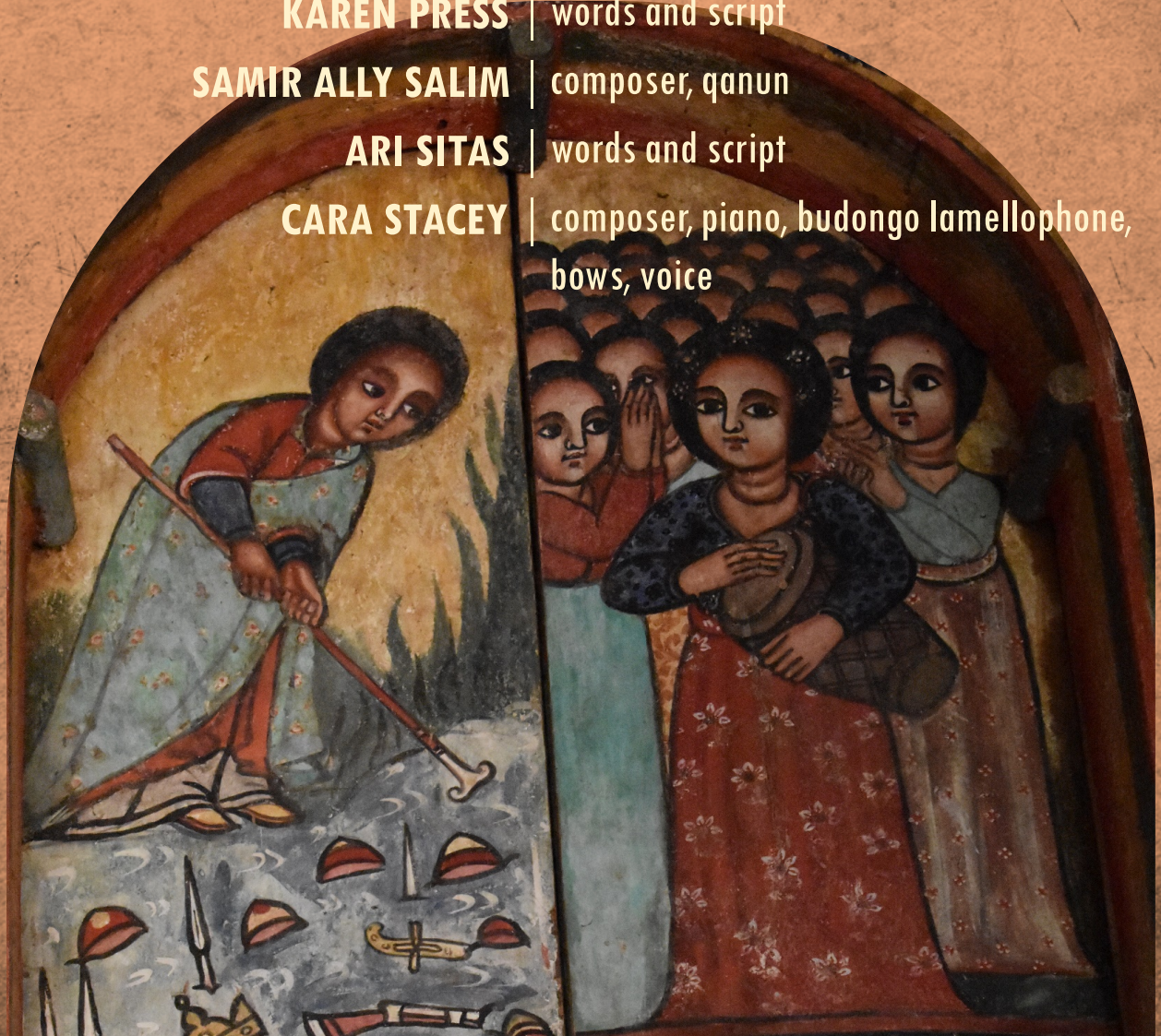
GRASELLA LUIGI | voice

KAREN PRESS | words and script

SAMIR ALLY SALIM | composer, qanun

ARI SITAS | words and script

CARA STACEY | composer, piano, budongo lamellophone, bows, voice



TIMELINE AND SYNOPSIS

OF GABRIEL'S ODYSSEY

Gabriel is born a Beta Israel Jew on the Ethiopian Highlands, probably in a village in the Semien Mountains or in Wagara or Dambeya, between the mountain range and the northern shore of Lake Tana.

1555

early
1560s

Gabriel is kidnapped as a young child by Ethiopian Christians 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.

Gabriel spends the next twenty years in Arabia, probably working as a domestic slave. Here he converts to Islam, taking the name Alihan.

1560s –
c.1582

Gabriel is sold again and finds himself in Muslim Chaul, the biggest port of the Ahmadnagar Sultanate in India, located on the left bank of the Kundalika River. He is sold by a Moorish man, Jamal, to another Moorish master called Mulá Mamede and taken to the city of Ahmadnagar, where he works as a stable boy. Mistreated and abused by his master, Gabriel's relations with Mulá Mamede sour. He meets and falls in love with a Moorish woman called Mixa Cobar.

Faced with his master's disapproval of his choice of bride, Gabriel flees with Mixa to the Estado da India in Portuguese Chaul. Here they find refuge with the Dominican priests of Our Lady of Guadalupe, 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 community of Chaul, opposes his marriage to Mixa and after only two months, Gabriel flees back to Ahmadnagar, apparently alone, where he reinvents himself as the Muslim Alihan, and lives for the next six years.

c.1582

1589

1595

Now forty years old, Gabriel returns to Portuguese Chaul to find a better life, but as he crosses into the Estado he encounters a Portuguese soldier who escorts him to the local Goa Inquisition. After being interrogated, Gabriel is deported to the notorious prison of Sabaio Palace in Goa. At his first trial, he is sentenced to serve at the monastery of Santo Tomás of the priests of São Domingos. In the distance, death row inmates are being marched to the execution site at the Campo de São Lazaro wearing penitential robes emblazoned with images of flames and demons. Gabriel flees the monastery of Santo Tomás and heads east in a bid to cross into the Ahmadnagar Sultanate to live as a Muslim again but is arrested on the outskirts of Goa. His second trial opens: he is charged with being a relapsed sinner, found guilty and sentenced to forced labour in the galleys of Goa. No more is known of his fate.

KUKUTANA ENSEMBLE

BIOGRAPHIES

FOUNDER/EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

DR. JANIE COLE (PhD University of London) is an Associate Lecturer at the University of Cape Town's College of Music and RAA Research Officer for East Africa, 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 currently the founding Renaissance Society of America Discipline Representative in Africana Studies (2019-21) and the founder/executive director of Music Beyond Borders, a platform for public musicology and engaged scholarship. www.musicbeyondborders.net

SCHOLAR-ARTISTS

PROF. ARI SITAS (words/script) is a writer, dramatist and sociologist. His latest piece of work is Notes for an Oratorio of Small Things that Fall published by Tulika Press in Delhi and Columbia University. He has recently directed A Sea-drift of Songs for the Re-Centring AfroAsia project which premiered in Cape Town in 2020. He has been a co-leader in the award-winning Insurrections Ensemble www.insurrectionsensemble.com. The Journal of Contemporary African Studies is curating a special issue on his sociological work in 2021.

DR. CARA STACEY (composer, piano, voice, budongo, bows) is a South African musician and musicologist. She is a pianist and plays southern African musical bows (umrhubhe, uhadi, makhweyane). Her research field is music in the Kingdom of eSwatini and southern African musical bows. Cara has performed across southern Africa, in the UK, Brazil, Peru, the USA and Switzerland with the likes of Shabaka Hutchings, Sarathy Korwar, Dan Leavers, Galina Juritz, Beat Keller and Matchume Zango. Cara is a Senior Lecturer in African Music at North-West University.

<http://www.carastacey.com/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PQWgeYr8za8>

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1ZqhW-](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1ZqhW-H2MAg&list=PLIDnYe90LHghhFtaCKyBYPs5oslrN_02&index=1)

[H2MAg&list=PLIDnYe90LHghhFtaCKyBYPs5oslrN_02&index=1](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1ZqhW-H2MAg&list=PLIDnYe90LHghhFtaCKyBYPs5oslrN_02&index=1)

KAREN PRESS (words/script) works as a freelance editor and writer. Her poetry has been published in journals and anthologies in South Africa and abroad, and she has published ten collections of poems. For the Recentring AfroAsia Project she has produced an English translation from the French edition of the Book of the Wonders of India, a key source of stories about the adventures of sailors on the AfroAsian seas in the tenth century.

KUKUTANA ENSEMBLE

BIOGRAPHIES

SCHOLAR-ARTISTS

MARK ARANHA (composer, guitarist) is a musician and musicologist from New Delhi. His research around the music and history of Jews and Mappilas of Kerala formed the basis of his Master's degree at the University of Cape Town. He has worked as a performer, composer, and producer with several artists including Susmit Sen, Sumangala Damodaran, and The Jass B'Stards. Mark has been associated with Re-Centring AfroAsia since 2016, performing music, conducting lectures, and presenting papers. In 2018, he co-directed the research-based creative production *Ife & Bilal: Songs on a journey*. Mark is planning to further his research on Mappila music in a doctoral programme at the University of the Witwatersrand.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=is8OLbKCYz8>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9v1eclr1gSQ>

DR. BRONWEN CLACHERTY (composer, voice, vibraphone, uhadi) is a Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of Cape Town's Centre for African Studies and the RAA project. She holds a Bachelor of Music degree from the University of Cape Town and a Master's degree in Participatory Arts from Goldsmiths College, University of London. Her RAA research focuses on women's history in Zanzibar and draws on various sources including oral history and particularly songs and stories.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0WtkVIDv5W0>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g68s0jzn3dE>

KATHYAYINI DASH (composer, voice, artist, words, script) is a visual artist, musician and researcher. Located at the edges of theory and practice, she is now working within the community field of Affect Studies that encapsulates the crossroads of history, sociology, performance and the visual arts. She has performed her work at the Artreach Festival Delhi (2017) and the Serendipity Arts Festival Goa (2018) and most recently has worked for various performance productions (Transgressions 2019; A Sea Drift of Songs 2020 among others) in South Africa as part of the Re-Centering Afro- Asia Project. She is currently pursuing her PhD in Theatre and Performance that lies at the interstices of historiography and performance at the University of Cape Town, South Africa.

<https://kathyayinidash.wordpress.com/portfolio/>

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 has wide performance experience working with the Ethiopian children and youth theatre houses in live stage performances, trio groups, the Yared School of Music orchestra and various traditional Ethiopian bands.

KUKUTANA ENSEMBLE

BIOGRAPHIES

SCHOLAR-ARTISTS

GRASELLA LUIGI (voice) is an Ethiopian violinist and singer. She holds a BA degree in Music from Addis Ababa University's Yared School of Music and is currently a Masters candidate in Arts of Music at the same institution. 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 band leader of a string orchestra at the Ethiopian National Theatre.

SAMIR ALLY SALIM (composer, qanun) is a Zanzibari musician and educator. Having studied qanun and vocal in Zanzibar, Samir now teaches music at the Dhow Countries Music Academy (DCMA). He collaborates on artistic and non-profit projects across East Africa. Throughout his performing and education career, Samir aims to promote Taarab music and exchange with musicians around the world in an environment that recognizes music's ability to foster positive change, social development and personal growth.

