

THE FORGOTTEN KINGDOM
PERFORMED BY **THE GUY MENDILOW ENSEMBLE**



ANDY BERGMAN — *Woodwinds, Jaw Harps, Thumb Pianos*

CHRIS BAUM — *Violin*

GUY MENDILOW — *Artistic Director; Voice, Guitar, Berimbau*

TAREQ RANTISI — *Percussion*

SOFÍA TOSELLO — *Voice*

www.guymendilowensemble.com

THE FORGOTTEN KINGDOM

PERFORMED BY THE GUY MENDILOW ENSEMBLE



Folding radio drama-style stories into a top-flight world music concert, *The Forgotten Kingdom* conjures women's voices lost to war. Audiences traverse picturesque Mediterranean port towns and ruined Ottoman villages, from Salónica to Sarajevo, guided by an "*international tour-de-force*" (Bethlehem Morning Call). World-class musicianship and cinematic storytelling restores living colour to faded, sepia snapshots of ordinary people caught up in extraordinary upheaval.

Weaving together late 19th/early 20th-century women's songs from Sephardic enclaves of the former Ottoman Empire, the show evokes a panorama of the unraveling of an older Mediterranean world — not as we see it today with the benefit of textbook hindsight, but as ordinary people lived it, unaware of how the dots would connect. With song lyrics in Ladino, an endangered blend of archaic Spanish with Turkish and Greek, together with English narration, with heart and humour, the show renders scenes of daily life from WWI and the Ottoman Empire's collapse to the glimmers of democratic hopes crushed by fascist regimes that cloaked entire communities in a 'shroud of oblivion.'

To bring audiences into these moments, the Ensemble draws on traditional tunes, techniques, and tales but in elegant arrangements and with radical reframing. The bittersweet rawness of Tango, gorgeous vocal harmonies and the rhythmic fire of classical Arabic percussion intensifies the emotionality of Western classical music. Adding such personal human dimensions to tales of the long-ago-and-far-away, *The Forgotten Kingdom* stirs resonant questions about our own struggles and dilemmas today.

WHY WE TELL THESE STORIES

The distance of time and place can have a dulling effect on our knowledge of history. For example, many today understand the rise of authoritarianism intellectually, from textbooks. But, especially in the US, most people no longer remember these events in a visceral, personal sense. We don't understand what the unraveling of democracy can feel like, what it can do to a nation, to communities.

We also view these histories from hindsight. We know how the story ends, understand the moral implications of terms like "fascism." We forget that for those living through these events, the end was far from certain, the day-to-day far more complex and ambiguous. Many thought fascism was indeed moral and just. Some who adopted fascism in the pursuit of a better tomorrow were themselves Jewish. Though their perspective and grievances were unique, pockets of Jews also reacted strongly to what they felt as hurtful socio-economic twists. Salónica, one of the hearths of Sephardic culture and the origin of many of the songs we sing, was home to a strong Jewish fascist contingent in the early 1930s. It wasn't until later that Greek fascism became racial. By then it was too late.

Stories, combined with the direct emotional language of music and evocative visuals, can do what lectures and books rarely can: They add living colour to detached black-and-white, affording us a more intimate human connection. The resulting empathy matters because it informs the voices we consider and the questions we ask as we struggle with who is American and who should have a place among us — racially, sexually, religiously; as we grapple with the dismantling of democratic guardrails and tribal fragmentation; as we steel ourselves to meet our moment with integrity and tenderness.

— Guy Mendilow

AN ENTIRELY TOO-BRIEF OVERVIEW OF LADINO SONG

The final expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1491 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 musicality mingled and cultural and linguistic offshoots eventually evolved.

The language itself is a beautiful illustration of these broader patterns. Various called Ladino, Spaniolit, Yehuditze, Hekatia, Saphardi or simply Spanish, the language is more like a number of closely related sub-streams, today grouped under the umbrella term Judeo-Spanish. To some extent, each community integrated words and expressions from the local language, including Greek, Slavic languages, Arabic, Turkish, and Hebrew. Wherever it is found, Judeo-Spanish is also a type of linguistic time capsule: The Spanish 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.

Judeo-Spanish is still spoken by pockets of Jews, today primarily in Israel, though it is considered an endangered language.

The Forgotten Kingdom springboards off of women's songs mainly from the communities of Sarajevo and Salónica. The traditional source music is primarily from the early twentieth century, 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 that we know today are much more recent.

THE GUY MENDILOW ENSEMBLE



"An international tour de force" (Bethlehem Morning Call) from the Middle East, South and North America, the Guy Mendilow Ensemble combines musicianship with cinematic storytelling in shows that *"explode with artistry, refinement, and excitement"* (Hebrew Union College), whisking audiences to distant times and picturesque places, conjuring voices lost to upheaval, to spark personal connections with stories of ordinary people living through extraordinary moments of change. Adding such visceral dimensions to tales of the long-ago-and-far-away, GME shows stir resonant questions about our own struggles and dilemmas today.

The Ensemble is 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 its artistry, cultural preservation and the strengthening of communities through the arts.

Alongside touring with GME, members are on the faculty of music schools like the Swarnabhoomi Academy of Music in India and tour/record with the likes of Bobby McFerrin, Yo Yo Ma, Snarky Puppy, the Assad Brothers, Christian McBride, the Video Game Orchestra, Amanda Palmer and Simon Shaheen. Formed in 2004, the Ensemble is based in Boston, MA and New York, NY, USA. Learn more at guymendilowensemble.com

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



GUY MENDILOW — ARTISTIC DIRECTOR; VOICE, GUITAR, BERIMBAU
Guy Mendilow was raised in a philosophically oriented, world-traveling family prioritizing continuous learning, disciplined curiosity and giving back. His love of music and story reflects a multi-generational family fascination with the unspoken assumptions that give our lives meaning. “These are the stories we unknowingly tell ourselves *about* ourselves and the ways we relate to what surrounds us,” Mendilow explains. “these stories are like the air we breathe: Most often they go undetected.” Like his family, Mendilow is tantalized by ways of listening that elevate these stories, and the values they transmit, to the attentional surface. He feels his work is first and foremost to listen and to strive to know these stories’ complex emotional landscapes. For Mendilow, music is the main tool for articulating these inner dimensions with increasing granularity. Combining music and stories can build a personal, humanized connection to lives and experiences that may otherwise be detached, only conceptual or “other.”

A citizen of Israel, Britain and the USA, Mendilow began his professional stage career at age 10, touring internationally and domestically with the American Boychoir and singing 200+ concerts a year in venues from Carnegie Hall and Boston Symphony Hall to churches in rural communities across the U.S.

An artist-in-residence with leading performing arts organizations like Celebrity Series of Boston, Mendilow is a teaching artist at universities across the U.S. from Harvard to the University of Washington. He directs the Dalcroze Music School of Boston, providing musicianship training for adults and children.

SOFÍA TOSELLO — VOICE

From Cordoba, Argentina, vocalist Sofía Tosello draws on her expertise in Latin American Cancion traditions from Tango to Chacarera to bring Sephardic song alive in 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 Horacio “El Negro” Hernández, Alex Cuba, and Marta Gómez. She is a teaching artist at performing arts organizations like NY’s Carnegie Hall and at universities from Reed College to the Swarnaboozhi Academy of Music in Chennai, India.

TAREQ RANTISI — PERCUSSION

Originally from Jerusalem, percussionist Tareq Rantisi began performing internationally in his teens with the Edward Said National Conservatory, appearing on such acclaimed recordings as the feature film soundtrack to *Bird on a Wire*. Tareq was awarded a full scholarship to the prestigious Berklee School of Music. He regularly collaborates with such artists as Simon Shaheen, Majazz, Kudsi Erguner and Mangred Leuchter, performing on stages from the Lotus Education and Arts Foundation in the US to Montreal's Royal Conservatory of Music and the Chabada Festival in France.

ANDY BERGMAN — WOODWINDS, JAW HARPS, THUMB PIANOS

Grounded in classical technique, multi-instrumentalist, composer, and recording artist Andy Bergman musicality is informed by years of work with a wide range of ensembles from orchestras and theater pits to afro-funk, klezmer, folk, reggae, and jazz bands. His growing list of credits includes appearances at the Chicago World Music Festival, Oslo World Music Festival, Festival Mawazine (Morocco), Baloise Session (Switzerland), Cully Jazz Festival (Switzerland), Colours of Ostrava (Czech Rep), Ashkenaz Festival (Toronto), Cappadox Festival (Turkey), Women Of The World Festival (Frankfurt), Carthage Jazz Festival (Tunisia), Philadelphia Folk Festival, Celebrity Series (Boston). Current collaborations include tours and recordings with Iyeoka, The Macrotones, Destroy Babylon, and The Doped Up Dollies.

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. Trained in a demanding classical environment, Baum expanded his musical vocabulary at Berklee College of Music, where he graduated with honors, studying under cellist Eugene Friesen, violinist Mimi Rabson, and composer Sheldon Mirowitz. Chris' growing list of credits include collaborations with Bent Knee, The Dear Hunter, Thirty Seconds to Mars, Dropkick Murphys, Amanda Palmer, Symmetry, Art Decade, Ben Levin, Jherek Bischoff, and the Video Game Orchestra, who recently featured him as a soloist at Boston’s Symphony Hall and on the ensemble's recent tours in China, Taiwan, and Japan.