

Tamir Shimshoni  
*composition*

Recital in partial fulfillment of the  
Doctor of Musical Arts, 2024  
Student of John Mallia

Sunday, May 5, 2024  
12:00 noon  
Brown Hall

PROGRAM

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Excerpts from *Shabbtai Tzvi*  
music and libretto by Tamir Shimshoni

|                 |                             |
|-----------------|-----------------------------|
| <i>Shabbtai</i> | Calvin Wamser, tenor        |
| <i>Natan</i>    | Henri Youmans, baritone     |
| <i>Sarah</i>    | Maklyn Baley, mezzo-soprano |
| <i>Avraham</i>  | Johan Hartman, baritone     |

Corinne Foley, oboe  
Abigail Heyrich, bassoon  
Sophia Szokolay, William Kinney, violin  
Yu-Heng Wang, viola  
Jonathan Fuller, cello  
Colby Heimburger, double bass  
Changjin Ha, harpsichord  
Tamir Shimshoni, conductor, electronics

Act I, Scene 1  
“For a Full Day and Night”

Act I, Scene 2  
“Sarah’s Story,” “Sarah’s Rage,” and “Fire”

*Intermission*

Act II, Scene 1  
“Shabbtai’s Rage” and “Sarah Leaves Shabbtai”

Act II, Scene 3  
“The ‘You Need’ Trio” and “Shabbtai’s Speech”

The story of Shabbtai Tzvi (1626-1676), the mystic who, for a brief period, convinced countless people that he was the Messiah and upended the entire Jewish world, is as fascinating as it is challenging. When Bruce Adolphe wrote his own opera on the same subject in 1983, he was met with harsh criticism from some of his family members, just for making the whole affair known to a general, non-Jewish audience; the general sentiment in traditional Jewish circles is that Shabbtai Tzvi is a source of shame and embarrassment best left forgotten. But how does a man convince Jews all across the Middle East, North Africa, and Europe, that he is the one true messenger of God? Did he really believe it himself? Were the people in his inner circle true believers, or were they opportunistically riding his coattails? How does a man foster a following so powerful, that it survives to this day, despite Tzvi's arrest and forced conversion to Islam by the Ottoman Empire? These questions, and other like them, were the catalyst for the composition of *Shabbtai Tzvi*

Composing an opera, even a chamber opera, is challenge enough; and that's without taking into account the many compounding challenges involved in the creation of this one. For one, I had taken it upon myself to write the libretto as well as compose the music. Because the story is based on a real, and incredibly controversial, historical figure, that meant that quite a lot of historical research needed to be done during the libretto-writing process, so as to ensure that the story is as true to the historical events as possible, while still telling a dramatic narrative worth being told. When it came to composing the music, I had decided to incorporate many disparate influences – most prominently Baroque and Middle Eastern music, to complement the time and setting. And, as the cherry on top, the opera also uses some electronics, which I have next to no prior experience with. With all of these elements put together, *Shabbtai Tzvi* is, without a doubt, the most challenging project I have ever created, and is also one I am incredibly proud to share with you, even in this current, truncated form.

– Tamir Shimshoni

### Act I, Scene 1: "For a Full Day and Night"

Gaza, 5425 HC (1665 AD). Shabbtai Tzvi meets with Rabbi Natan, and the two hit it off immediately, due to their shared interest in Kabbalah and distaste for traditional rabbinical authority. Eventually, Shabbtai confides in Natan that he had received a vision, informing him that he's the Messiah. Natan is stunned... because he had also received a vision, telling him of the Messiah's impending arrival.

### Act II, Scene 2: "Sarah's Story," "Sarah's Rage," and "Fire"

*(Content Warning: this scene includes description of childhood sexual trauma and possible sexual assault)*

A few months later, Jerusalem. Shabbtai is visited by a mysterious woman, Sarah, who claims to be his future wife. Despite his obvious discomfort with Sarah's sexually brazen behavior, Shabbtai allows her to explain who she is. After escaping anti-Jewish riots as a young girl, she was brought to a convent and raised as a Christian. One night, she received an apparition of her father's ghost, reconnecting her with her forgotten Jewish heritage, and telling her she is destined to marry the

Messiah, which she believes Shabbtai to be. Shabbtai is moved by her story, but tells her they can't marry, as he's already married. He introduces her to his "wife" – a Torah scroll. Sarah is enraged and berates Shabbtai, accusing him of playing up his eccentricity, and refusing to accept that he doesn't find her attractive. The confrontation breaks Shabbtai down, and he reveals that, as a child, he was plagued with "visions" of "demons of lust" that assaulted him and burned his penis. As a result, he became psychologically unable to have relations with either of his two previous (human) wives.

#### Act II, Scene 1 "Shabbtai's Rage" and "Sarah Leaves Shabbtai"

A prison cell in Gallipoli, 5426 HC (1666 AD). Shabbtai has recently been put in jail for attempting to overthrow the Ottoman Empire. Despite this, he is still in high spirits, fully convinced this is only a temporary setback. He is visited by Sarah, who pulls the rug from under him – he isn't getting out of jail anytime soon, and his movement has already started to crumble in his absence. Enraged, Shabbtai hurls abuse at Sarah. This proves to be the final straw for Sarah, who announces in no uncertain terms that she's leaving him.

#### Act I, Scene 3: "The 'You Need' Trio" and "Shabbtai's Speech"

*(In this scene, some participation from the audience is encouraged.)*

Gaza, 5426 HC (1666 AD). Shabbtai, Natan, Sarah and Avraham (another of Shabbtai's followers) survey a large crowd of people gathered outside. Natan, Sarah and Avraham begin arguing what Shabbtai should say to them; their squabbling nearly comes to blows. Shabbtai silences them and addresses the large crowd of his followers. In a fiery speech, he tells them that he comes to bring about their salvation. He decrees that several important traditional fast days should no longer be observed, and rails against the traditional rabbinical authority; access to the divine can and will belong to everyone. He finishes by detailing his plan to go to Istanbul and take over the Ottoman Empire (with the rest of the gentile kingdoms soon to follow), and leads the crowd in a fiery and defiant recitation of the kaddish.

(Crowd and cheering sounds taken

from: <https://freesound.org/people/klankbeeld/sounds/171317/>

and <https://freesound.org/people/GregorQuendel/packs/27224/>)

## Upcoming Student Recitals at NEC

*all programs subject to change*

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**Rituparna Mukherjee**, *viola* (MM)

Student of Nicholas Cords

*Sunday, May 5, 2024 at 4:00 p.m., Pierce Hall*

**Mark Tempesta**, *tenor* (DMA)

Student of Jane Eaglen

*Sunday, May 5, 2024 at 4:00 p.m., Williams Hall*

**Sarah Tindall** *cello* (BM)

Student of Lluís Claret

*Sunday, May 5, 2024 at 4:00 p.m., Burnes Hall*

**Hannah Goldstick**, *violin* (MM)

Student of Miriam Fried

*Sunday, May 5, 2024 at 8:00 p.m., Brown Hall*

**MinSun Im**, *tenor* (GD)

Student of Carole Haber

*Sunday, May 5, 2024 at 8:00 p.m., Williams Hall*

**Elton Tai**, *viola* (BM)

Student of Marcus Thompson

*Sunday, May 5, 2024 at 8:00 p.m., Burnes Hall*

**Shiyu Zhuo**, *soprano* (MM)

Student of Carole Haber

*Monday, May 6, 2024 at 1:00 p.m., Burnes Hall*

**Xijin Chen**, *soprano* (MM)

Student of Carole Haber

*Monday, May 6, 2024 at 4:00 p.m., Brown Hall*

**Clayton Stephenson**, *piano* (GD '25)

Student of Wha Kyung Byun

*Monday, May 6, 2024 at 4:00 p.m., Pierce Hall*

**Chen Chen**, *soprano* (BM)

Student of Michael Meraw

*Monday, May 6, 2024 at 8:00 p.m., Brown Hall*

## Upcoming Student Recitals at NEC

—continued

**Boyuan Cheng**, *piano* (MM)

Student of Dang Thai Son

*Monday, May 6, 2024 at 8:00 p.m., Pierce Hall*

**Christine Yuting Huang**, *piano* (MM)

Student of Alexander Korsantia and Alessio Bax

*Monday, May 6, 2024 at 8:00 p.m., Williams Hall*

**Margaret Stone**, *soprano* (MM)

Student of Carole Haber

*Tuesday, May 7, 2024 at 1:00 p.m., Williams Hall*

**Yoona Kim**, *contemporary musical arts* (GD)

Student of Stratis Minakakis

*Tuesday, May 7, 2024 at 8:00 p.m., Burnes Hall*

**Daniel Oslin**, *piano* (BM)

Student of HaeSun Paik and Randall Hodgkinson

*Wednesday, May 8, 2024 at 1:00 p.m., Williams Hall*

**Cameron Alan-Lee**, *violin* (GD)

Student of Ayano Ninomiya

*Wednesday, May 8, 2024 at 3:00 p.m., Brown Hall*

**Hyun Ji Lee**, *violin* (GD)

Student of Donald Weilerstein

*Wednesday, May 8, 2024 at 8:00 p.m., Keller Room*

**Sabrina Ngaieng Lai**, *percussion* (BM)

Student of Daniel Bauch and Timothy Genis

*Wednesday, May 8, 2024 at 8:00 p.m., Burnes Hall*

**Kevin Takeda**, *piano* (MM)

Student of Wha Kyung Byun

*Wednesday, May 8, 2024 at 8:00 p.m., Williams Hall*

**Alex Knutrud**, *trombone* (DMA '26)

Student of Stephen Lange

*Thursday, May 9, 2024 at 8:00 p.m., Keller Room*

**Upcoming Student Recitals at NEC**

*–continued*

**Jewel Pin-Chieh Chen**, *piano* (MM)

Student of Stephen Drury

*Friday, May 10, 2024 at 1:00 p.m., Keller Room*

**Kian Hirayama**, *oboe* (MM)

Student of Keisuke Wakao

*Friday, May 10, 2024 at 1:00 p.m., JH 124*

**Hanwen Shi**, *piano* (MM)

Student of Alexander Korsantia

*Friday, May 10, 2024 at 8:00 p.m., St. Botolph G-01*

**Eli Geruschat**, *percussion* (MM)

Student of Daniel Bauch and Matthew McKay

*Friday, May 10, 2024 at 8:00 p.m., JH Sinfonia*

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Latecomers will be seated at the discretion of management.

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