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National Endowment for the Arts MYRIAD

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### **ABOUT THE SHOW**

The Forgotten Kingdom's intertwining music and storytelling conjure voices from Sephardic communities lost to war and upheaval. It's an evocative trek through former Ottoman lands during the turmoil of the 1920's and '30's, during the rise of fascism. Rendering stories and songs of an older age with drama, humour and heart, The Forgotten Kingdom finds highly resonant, deeply moving connections to contemporary struggles, debates, and dilemmas.

### STORYLINE

The Forgotten Kingdom' tells of the ending of an age, one whose passing begins with the traumas of the Great War and the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and whose definitive ending is ushered in by WWII. With sand animation, the tale will be told through glimpses and impressions captured in a book of memories found by a daring refugee girl upon her return to her ruined village in 1944. She does not know whose sketches these are. But in the pages she sees her own story, and that of her family. The sketches capture day-to-day life, from the final decades of the 19th century, on through the onset of WWI and ultimately chronicling the disillusion, betrayal and heartache that turned neighbor upon neighbor and covered entire communities with a 'shroud of oblivion' as tens of thousands were deported to camps like Auschwitz.

The book is not complete. The show poses a hopeful question: How do you pick up the pieces? The show ends with the girl's determination to continue the story. As she embarks on a new beginning, she adds her own sketches to the book.

The Forgotten Kingdom springs from Sephardi women's songs from the late 19th and early 20th centuries. All music is in the endangered Ladino language, a combination of archaic Spanish with Turkish and Greek. The narration is in English. The show weaves its tale impressionistically, through a series of vignettes with recurring characters and themes. The addition of Kseniya Simonova's captivating, nuanced visual storytelling will enable the show to reverberate on deeper levels.

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[click here] Complete Presenters' Kit — The Forgotten Kingdom



### WHY SAND ANIMATION?

Had this been just a cultural preservation effort, it would have sufficed. There are few high-level, USA-based touring Ladino productions, and none that present Sephardic song in such a long-form storied way. But The Forgotten Kingdom does not only look to the past. It uses evocative music and story to ignite imaginations, stirring resonance with debates and struggles in our moment. Combined with a breadth and depth of community engagement, this is a potent package.

The show is intended for diverse audiences not yet familiar with Sephardi cultures, in urban and rural communities across the USA. Mendilow and his international musical collaborators bring audiences on a musical trek through a nearly lost world, a journey through former Ottoman lands starting in Sarajevo and winding through Salónica. The intertwining music and storytelling conjure voices lost to war, recorded in a language blending archaic Spanish with Turkish and Greek. Mendilow's arrangements, as well as the story he crafts that ties them together, are grounded in his careful research in Sephardic scholarship and ethnomusicological field recordings. GME imbues stories and songs of an older age with drama, humor and heart.

As powerful as the existing production is, animation will make it even more so. The addition of sand animation will heighten the show's resonance, relevance and attraction to disparate populations, significantly advancing the cultural preservation impact of the work and further evoking questions about the ways some old stories continue to play out in a modern guise.

Simonova's masterful sand animation offers a beautiful metaphor both for this story and the project itself: creating something new from something old; something that, by its very nature, is constantly evolving.

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### DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

Ladino songs tell great stories. Not because they are Jewish or Mediterranean, but because they present near-universal themes that continue to captivate today. The story of the stories—a study in immigrants' shifting identities, tradition's evolution, resilience and struggle—is alive and relevant today, too.

The story of Ladino mirrors experiences that most GME artists live as immigrants to the USA. Not only have we changed because we're in our new home, this home has changed because we're here. We'd do well to recall that this is also the American tale.

What has haunted me in creating The Forgotten Kingdom is how these stories give us a glimpse into an era's end, and what it's like to be caught up in the shift from one age to a very different new one. Each scene can be pegged either to the "old world" (pre WWI) or to the "new world" (i.e. OURS).

Many scenes are set against the last vestiges of the Ottoman Empire, as a centuries-old order broke down under the weight of the traumatic Great War. The old world remained, but teetered on the brink. What was it like for those on the cusp? Imagine for a moment the soldiers in La Vuelta Del Marido, depicting horses with breastplates of silver, charges led by handsome officers with plumes and white gloves. This is a true image of European armies. And this is exactly how some of the first officers rode into the first battles of WWI. These gallant soldiers rode straight into the mechanized warfare of the Battle of the Frontiers. How brutal, this clash of old and new worlds.

Looking back with historical hindsight, it may seem inevitable, especially because this was the birth of our world. But to those living through the changes, the course must've been anything but a foregone conclusion. I wanted to explore what it was like to see the breakdown of empires, of democratic norms, the glimmers of hope that then evaporate.

In what ways do we also already straddle two worlds? If we, or my son's generation, are destined to know two very different eras, the wake up call won't come in the form of WWI's storm of steel, nor in Fascist black shirts. What guise will it take this time?

The circumstances and details have shifted. Yet much of the story still plays out. Those elements that move us in these old adventures — courage, working together across ethnic lines, strength in the face of despair — speak to ways we too might grapple with our own unfolding tale. I feel driven to evoke such questions through the The Forgotten Kingdom. Success hinges on our ability to sweep the audience away in a compelling experience. I am confident that the addition of spellbinding visual storytelling will significantly enhance the work's impact by heightening the audience's emotional engagement and connections. The past lets us feel the potential risks, terrors, and wonders the future might bring, and steel ourselves to meet this future with integrity and tenderness.

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### ARTIST BIOGRAPHIES

### GUY MENDILOW ENSEMBLE

"An international tour de force" (Bethlehem Morning Call) from the Middle East, South and North America, the Guy Mendilow Ensemble transports audiences to the long-ago-and-far-away...to hold a mirror for our own here-and-now. The world-class ensemble combines evocative storytelling with emotionally captivating music in shows that "explode with artistry, refinement, and excitement" (Hebrew Union College), conjuring voices lost to war and upheaval, whisking audiences to distant times and picturesque places and, ultimately, stirring highly resonant, deeply moving connections to contemporary struggles and dilemmas.

The National Endowment for the Arts recognized the Guy Mendilow Ensemble for the creation of artthat meets the highest standards of excellence, public engagement with diverse and excellent art and the strengthening of communities through the arts.

The Guy Mendilow Ensemble tours four shows: The Forgotten Kingdom; Heart of the Holidays—A Global Celebration in Song; Three Sides to Every Story; and Around the World in Song family concerts. Distinguished educators, the ensemble specializes in community engagement including tailor-made residencies, choral/string collaborations and a breadth of interactive workshops. The Ensemble is an artist in residence with **Celebrity Series of Boston's** Arts for All since 2014.

Alongside touring with the Guy Mendilow Ensemble, 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.



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### ARTIST BIOGRAPHIES (CONTINUED)

#### KSENIYA SIMONOVA (SAND ARTIST)

Performance artist in sand animation. Simonova is a graduate of the Artistic School of Yevpatoria, the Tavrida National V.I. Vernadsky University and the Ukrainian Academy of Printing. She lives and works in Yevpatoria, Ukraine.

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.

In 2009, Simonova was catapulted into international fame when she won Ukraine's Got Talent. One of the pieces that she performed in the competition was a sand story about Germany's destruction of the Ukraine during World War II, as experienced by a young couple separated by the war.

Simonova has performed over 200 sand stories for audiences in Ukraine, Russia, Norway, Japan, Poland, Austria, China, United Kingdom, Netherlands, Qatar, India, Italy, Germany, Switzerland, Kazakhstan, Malta and others, including presidents, heads of states and royalty.



### ADDITIONAL LINKS

- Presenter's Show Kit The Forgotten Kingdom
- COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PACKAGES THE FORGOTTEN KINGDOM
- ARTICLE: THE EYES OF THE ENEMY IN THE MIRROR OF STORY (G. Mendilow) about some of the early 20th-century Utopian movements with which The Forgotten Kingdom deals and the need to look on these historical moments from the perspective of group members themselves to develop a deeper understanding. After all, these people firmly believed they were on the right side of history, following moral, just paths.
- AUDIO: NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE ART'S ART WORKS PODCAST WITH GUY MENDILOW about the relevance of The Forgotten Kingdom, and the ways that some old stories continue to play out in modern guise.
- WATCH A SAMPLE SAND ANIMATION FROM THE SHOW (ON NEA'S WEBSITE) [CLICK HERE]

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