

# ResoNation: Sacred Sounds Beyond Borders

*A Sacred World Music Festival coming to the GTU in September 2019*

*By Lydia Webster*

A sacred world music festival is coming to the GTU in September 2019, thanks to a unique initiative jointly conceived by several GTU faculty members and a recent graduate. Sponsored by GTU's Center for the Arts & Religion (CARE), *ResoNation: Sacred Sound Beyond Borders* aims to present and explore music that celebrates and heals the human spirit and transcends borders.

"With this sacred music festival, we hope to reach out from 'Holy Hill,' and open up what we do at the GTU to the wider Bay Area," explains GTU alumna and festival producer Eleanor Shapiro (PhD, '18). "I am proud of this institution, what it stands for, and what it has to offer."

Drawing on her experience as producer of the Berkeley-based Jewish Music Festival before its hiatus in 2015, Dr. Shapiro has brought together a diverse planning committee for the GTU festival, including faculty, students, and staff with experience as spiritual leaders and musicians within various religious traditions. The committee hopes to draw on the spiritual vitality of the Bay Area to create an inclusive event with performances, participatory workshops, and educational forums. The inaugural concert for the festival's first edition is being planned for Saturday evening, September 14, at a local venue. On Sunday, September 15, a community music day for all ages will take place on the campus of the Pacific School of Religion. Workshops and concerts by Bay Area artists and organizations will cultivate a space for spiritual exploration through sound for followers of all faiths and none.

The festival is a partnership between multiple GTU member schools and centers and is being planned in collaboration with the University of Cal-



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ifornia, Berkeley. Rev. Dr. Doniel Mark Wilson, director of the UCB Gospel Choir, is serving on the planning committee, with Dr. Cynthia Cox, chair of the UCB Department of Music, serving as an advisor.

Eleanor Shapiro's idea for a music festival showcasing the religious diversity that epitomizes the GTU came to her as she was listening to GTU president Rabbi Daniel Lehmann speak of the need for new outreach initiatives. After fifteen years of work with the Jewish Music Festival, an outreach program of the Jewish Community Center of the East Bay, Shapiro had seen how that event nurtured the nascent revival of klezmer music and became a way for local and internationally known artists to connect. Over time it created a sense of community for those who returned year after year. And for many, it was their

main connection to the JCC.

While Shapiro initially imagined a GTU festival of sacred music, two GTU faculty members—Dr. Rita Sharma, director of the Center for Dharma Studies (CDS), and Dr. Kyle Schiefelbein-Guerrero, director of digital learning and a liturgical scholar—had previously been envisioning an academic conference focused on "sacred sound." A coordinating committee came together in September 2018 to bring the two ideas together.

Stefan Andrea Waligur, a musician and GTU doctoral student currently teaching a Newhall course on "Sacred Sound in World Religions," serves on the festival planning committee. He believes, "The GTU offers an ideal intersection of world traditions of sacred sound. For scholars and practitioners alike, this festival represents an exciting exploration of a new paradigm that unites the academy with practice. It's time."

Shapiro's hope is that a GTU sacred world music festival will counter the hopelessness generated by the current political climate. "Our aim is to embrace difference, rather than fear it," she explains. "As the most comprehensive center for the graduate study of religion in North America, the GTU is the perfect place to celebrate our differences in ways that illuminate, entertain, and engage people."

The planning committee is seeking to raise the funds necessary to allow the community music day to be a free public event. For more information, or to make an online contribution, please visit [www.gtu.edu/resonation](http://www.gtu.edu/resonation) or contact Dr. Eleanor Shapiro at [eshapiro@gtu.edu](mailto:eshapiro@gtu.edu). ♦

*Lydia Webster is assistant curator at CARE's Doug Adams Gallery and a member of the ResoNation planning committee.*