

East Meets West

Sat, August 1, 2026



Espacio Flamenco

217 SW 1ST AVE, PORTLAND

Some Backstory

As colonial expansion took hold of North Africa and Asia in the 19th Century, artists from France and England became enamored with their idea of the “Orient,” a vague place signifying exotic lands and people, less rooted in geography and essentially a catch-all for “over there.” The French orientalist composers were particularly smitten, creating some of the most iconic music of all time (think Bizet’s *Carmen* and Ravel’s *Shéhérazade*) based on their vague impressions of mixed-up elements from different cultures and then filling in the blanks with their own wild imaginations.

As a fifth-generation Chinese-American, I have long been fascinated by the exoticization of eastern cultures. It is easy to fall into the trap of believing stereotypes that stem from old colonial attitudes towards non-western cultures. Even the notion of vast and diverse regions being framed as “non-western” is problematic, yet we still lack the collective shorthand to describe it otherwise in a way that all, at least in the West, can understand. I find myself falling into that trap because of my cultural conditioning and also resisting it because I know that the truth is infinitely more layered and interesting than these shallow impressions ever could be.

This theme has continually resurfaced in my artistic work for well over a decade now. The dialogue grows and changes as I continue to wrestle with my love for the beauty of French orientalist music. Its depictions of people and cultures can be ignorant and harmful, while also being fantastical and evocative. I too, want to visit these distant lands, even if they only exist in the mind. It is cathartic and even necessary to dream and to fantasize, as long as one can recognize the mirage for what it is and acknowledge the diverse lived realities of the peoples represented.

It is impossible to be an expert on all the rich musical traditions that come from the many lands once called the “Orient,” so I am grateful to the artists of *East Meets West* who have contributed their knowledge and skill as we pay homage to the music, both ancient and modern, from the regions today known as Spain, North Africa, the Middle East, and the Far East. It is an honor to celebrate this buffet of cross-cultural music and dance. My hope is that by bringing together these different perspectives, both in direct contrast and in collaboration, we can learn about our collective past while creating space for a collective future of healing and exploration.

Jessica Blau
Director & Founder of Musica Mixta



Program

Adieux de l'hôtesse arabe	Georges Bizet
Lamma Bada Yatathanna	Traditional Arabic, Al-Andalus
La Brise, <i>Mélodies persanes</i>	Camille Saint-Saëns
Habibi Dyali	Traditional, Morocco
Kaddisch, <i>Deux mélodies hébraïques</i>	Maurice Ravel
Keskin Bıçak	Sezen Aksu, Turkey
Ya Ana Ya Ana	Fairuz/Mozart, Lebanon/Austria
<i>Pleiades Dances</i>	Takashi Yoshimatsu, Japan
Book I, Op. 27: Leaflet Dance	
Book II, Op. 28: Positive Rondo	
Désir de l'Orient	Saint-Saëns
Samra Ya Samra	Karem Mahmoud, Egypt

INTERMISSION 15 MINS

Atini Nay Wa Ghanni	Naguib Hankeshy, Lebanon
Nuit d'Espagne	Jules Massenet
Tou Ey Pari Kojae	Homayoun Khorram, Iran
Zambra Gitana/La Estrella	Ernesto Lecuona/traditional, Cuba/Spain
<i>Le rossignol éperdu</i>	Reynaldo Hahn
Rêverie nocturne sur le Bosphore	
La rosa enflorace	15 th C. Sephardic, Al Andalus
Nebtidi Mnain El Hikaya	Mohamed Abdel Wahab, Egypt
Morgh-E Sahar	Morteza Neydavoud, Iran
Asie, <i>Shéhérazade</i>	Ravel

Artists



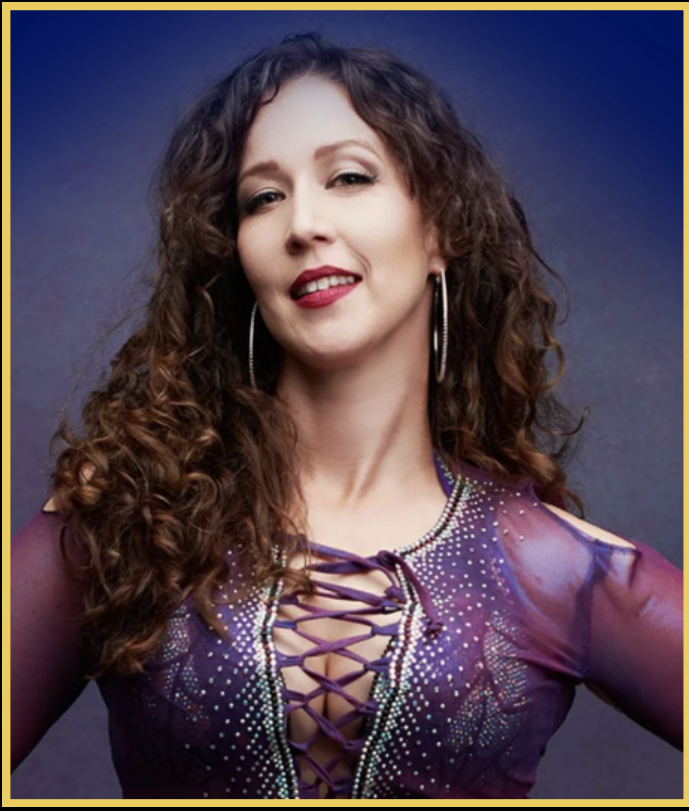
Moroccan-born artist, **Randa BenAziz** grew up in a musical family and began performing at an early age. Largely self-taught, her vocal style is deeply influenced by the mix of Arabic and flamenco music that she was exposed to in Morocco, further intensified by her time studying flamenco in Seville, Spain. She draws inspiration from artists such as Chambao, Niña Pastori, Estrella Morente, and Camarón de la Isla. Randa's move from Morocco to Portland at

a young age also gave her a taste for a variety of musical genres beyond her cultural roots, including American pop and R&B. Her multicultural life experiences inform her diverse and nuanced performances in a multitude of languages and styles.



Mezzo-soprano and Musica Mixta founder **Jessica Blau** has had one foot firmly planted in both the classical music and flamenco worlds for over two decades as an opera singer and as a dancer. It is her joy and passion to create fusion performances that explore new boundaries. Jessica has sung nationally with companies such as Florentine Opera (WI), Opera Cultura (CA), The Why Collective (NYC), Castleton Festival (VA), Houston Grand

Opera, and Portland Opera. Outside of her work with Musica Mixta, she has also self-produced *Sojourns on the Silk Road*, featuring the critically acclaimed flamenco dancer Fanny Ara (2022, Houston, TX) and *Viva España!* with Portland Opera (2024).



Heather Henna Louise is a Portland-based raqs sharqi (belly dance) artist and educator whose dance is grounded in a responsive relationship to live music. She has studied extensively with renowned Middle Eastern dancers and musicians and performed for many years as the lead dancer with the Middle Eastern rock band Ritim Egzotik. She teaches through Al Wadi Dance Company in Portland and Datura Online, and continues to perform at festivals, weddings, and cultural events throughout the Pacific Northwest.



Daniel Shaheen Moltke is a Danish-Iranian-American musician, attorney, and legislative director who has performed with the National Arab Orchestra, the Los Angeles Arab Orchestra, the UCSB Middle East Ensemble, and other esteemed groups, bringing a deep cultural perspective to the stage. He serves on the boards of ArtMax Academy of Persian Music and the Arab American Cultural Center of Oregon, where he supports initiatives that preserve cultural heritage, expand music education, and make the arts more accessible to all Oregonians.



Nazli Rahmanian has been singing since childhood, drawn to the connecting power of a song sung from the heart. Raised in Iran, she began learning a variety of Persian and Turkish folk music styles from her aunt and uncle and later studied classical voice in Tehran where, post-revolution, singing for women was forbidden and musical life had to remain underground. In addition to the folk and mystical traditions of Iran, Nazli is inspired by world music, notably that of Latin America and Spain. She performs regularly with her brother Rowshan and is also a member of Resonance, a multicultural ensemble of artists from Turkey, Armenia, Slovenia, and the US, with which she has most recently performed in Istanbul.



Jason Ramirez is a Portland-based percussionist who began his musical education in school choir and then quickly thereafter was drawn to the drums. For the past 20 years, his focus has been on percussion used in music from various Arabic and Turkish cultures, like Tabla/Darbuka, Riqq, and Davul. His playing style and technique reflects his desire to represent authenticity for each culture's style as best he can. Jason's style is modeled after his

interests in Turkish Roman (9/8's all day please!), Early Egyptian Arabic, Greek, and Balkan music but will always draw from his experience in other genres like Samba and West African percussion.



Rebecca Stager is a collaborative pianist and vocal coach from the greater Portland area. She holds a BA in Music from Oregon State University and earned her MA in Accompanying at the Manhattan School of Music. Currently, Rebecca works at Reed College as a staff accompanist, while remaining an active freelancer within the Willamette Valley collaborating on everything from opera arias to Broadway musicals, from new instrumental works by local composers

to beloved choral classics. In her time off, you can find Rebecca happily watching sci-fi with her son and husband while obsessively crocheting doilies and lace.



A performer since childhood, **Elena Villa** was introduced to dance in the artistic enclaves of Big Sur and Santa Cruz, CA in the 1970s. She has studied flamenco and SWANA dances with teachers from the cultures of origin in the U.S. and in Spain and North Africa. While teaching dance for nearly thirty years, Elena traveled regionally to teach workshops, perform professionally, and work in educational music and dance residencies in primary schools, colleges, and

universities as a guest lecturer and performer. Elena also pursued her love of dance academically through the fields of literature, cultural studies, and performance studies. She has a PhD in Comparative Literature from UO and currently divides her time between dance study and performance and teaching in the English department at PCC.

It Takes a Village

We are grateful to **Espacio Flamenco** for hosting us and to the following people who have generously contributed their resources to making this program possible:

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Lisa Lum
Kenzo Mendoza
Ryan Paxton
Nazli Rahmanian & Gevara Teebi
Judy & Jonathan Schaff
Casey Sugie
Elena Villa
Shani Young



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