

May 1, 2011

Dean Virginia Sapiro
College of Arts & Sciences
725 Commonwealth Avenue
Boston, MA

Dear Dean Sapiro:

I am pleased to announce the successful close of the 2010-2011 schedule for the Scripture and the Arts Program! Attached you will find a summary report of our activity. This year we were able to reach out to a number of other organizations such as the BU Humanities Foundation, the Jewish Cultural Endowment and the Core Curriculum to present five diverse offerings that spanned chronological, geographic and scriptural space, including two lectures, one film screening, one intimate musical evening and one large-scale musical production which featured a full orchestra and choral ensemble.

The unifying theme of this year's program has been its emphasis on blending and the synthesis of scriptural ideas. From the traces of Byzantine Islam in the architecture of medieval Palermo to the mélange of scriptural influences on the Ottoman musical tradition—from the struggles of the modern Jonah to adjust to a secular world to the influence the Ramayana had on the life of a Jewish woman suffering from heartbreak in Brooklyn—and indeed to the marriage of two diverse Daoist traditions seen partly through the lens of hagiography—all of this year's programs have resonated with themes of synthesis and the dialectic that scripture has encouraged in them.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your continued support of our program. Our events this year saw a 150% increase in attendance, and much of that audience, we were happy to see, came in the form of increased undergraduate attendance. Both Nina Paley and Matti Kovler were able to come into the classroom and speak directly with students—many of whom attended those respective events. We hope to continue this trend next year, as we develop a slate of events for 2011-2012 which is designed to complement our curriculum and invite attendance from all levels of the university.

With much gratitude,

Deeana Klepper
Chair, Department of Religion

Program Events: Fall 2010

The Program in Scripture and the Arts began its 2010-2011 season with "**Rhetoric, Ambition and the Function of the Cappella Palatina in Palermo**" a lecture given by University of Rome Professor Beat Brenk on **Wednesday, October 20** in the fourth floor chapel at Hillel House. Dr. Brenk captivated his audience with a series of incredible slides taken on scaffolding in this medieval chapel--many depicting art never before seen by the greater public. His examination of sacred architectural space considered whether this art and architecture was, as is often claimed, an amalgam of influence from the Byzantine and Islamic artisans who worked on it, or rather, as Dr. Brenk argues, a specific design choice made by the Norman and Christian king Roger II in order to celebrate his victories and support his claims. A Q&A with the audience followed the lecture, which was attended by more than 40 undergrads, graduate students, faculty and guest faculty invited from schools such as Wellesley, Tufts and Duke University. The lively conversation continued at the well-attended reception.

Our second event of the season was "**An Ottoman Tableau of Faith**", presented on **November 17, 2010**. Offered with the support of the Boston University Humanities Foundation, this lively concert brought together scriptural music from three Ottoman religious traditions: Islam, Sufi Judaism and Greek Orthodoxy. In their second visit to the Scripture & the Arts program, Boston's DUNYA Ensemble received a warm reception at BU's Hillel House, playing to a packed house of more than 80 attendees, including undergraduate and graduate students, faculty and members of the Boston Community. DUNYA principals Robert Labaree, Mehmet Ali Sanlikol and Cem Mutlu were joined in this second performance by Panayotis League and Noam Sender. Instruments included çeng, rebab, ney, ud, divan sazı, cura, kemençe, various sorts of percussion and voice. The devotional songs were sung in Greek, Hebrew and Turkish, and were introduced and contextualized by Professor Emine Fetvaci from Boston University. Selections included songs from the Koran, the Greek Orthodox liturgy and Songs of the Alevi and the Bektasi. This presentation was a rare opportunity to explore the intersections and divergences of three important scriptural and musical worlds with one of Boston's best-loved musical ensembles. The music was followed by a question and answer with the musicians and a reception featuring a selection of Mediterranean foods.

Program Events: Spring 2011

On **Tuesday, March 1st**, the Program for Scripture and the Arts presented "**The Escape of Jonah**" an oratorio by emerging Israeli composer Matti Kovler. Sponsored by The Jewish Cultural Endowment and the Boston University Humanities Foundation, this work, which Kovler has styled as "music-theater", retold the story of the biblical prophet Jonah from the point of view of a modern immigrant, bringing together the sounds of a nine-piece band, choir, soloists and electronics. Written by Matti Kovler and directed by Michael Rotenstein, the English libretto was written by Janice Silverman Rebibo, inspired by Sivan Beskin's original poem. The concert also featured an additional work by Kovler: *Here Comes Messiah!*, scored for soprano and chamber ensemble, directed by Masha Nemirovsky, libretto by Janice Silverman Rebibo, which was first performed at Carnegie Hall.

The CFA Concert Hall was filled with a crowd of more than 250 attendees, of whom an estimated third were undergraduate students, but which also included faculty and many visitors from the Boston community. The concert was introduced by Department of Religion Chair Deena Klepper, who placed the work into scriptural context. In addition to students from Boston University, the performers included students of the New England Conservatory, and Northeastern University. Featured performers were

Reut Rivka, a sublime Israeli soprano who is currently studying in Holland, and the very talented Ezra Weller, who, with his trumpet, played the musical role of Jonah. The concert was followed by a question and answer session with Matti Kovler, in which many thoughtful questions were presented about his compositional process, and the challenges of working with such a variety of material and influences. Matti Kovler was also able to attend Professor Klepper's RN104 a week prior to the concert to speak with students about his work.

Continuing a tradition of welcoming lectures from Boston University Department of Religion faculty, the Program for Scripture & the Arts was pleased to present a lecture on **March 23, 2011** by Assistant Professor Tom Michael, entitled: "**Ge Hong and the Formation of the Medieval Daoist Transcendent.**" Held at the College of Arts & Sciences building, more than 50 students and faculty came to hear about daoist thinker Ge Hong's (283- 343), whose Shenxian Zhuan stands out as one of the most powerfully innovative and influential texts of the entire Daoist religion. Michael argued that Ge Hong's work successfully established the image of the Daoist transcendent that would remain popular even to the present day and explored the ways in which the various hagiographies of the Shenxian Zhuan depict two very different types of masters and the ways in which Ge Hong masterfully melded them into the single concept of the Daoist transcendent. Michael followed the very successful lecture by answering a variety of questions on his work, which puts the work of Ge Hong into an entirely new perspective. A wine and cheese reception followed the lecture, in Room 202.

Our final event of the 2010-2011 season was a screening of filmmaker Nina Paley's *Sita Sings the Blues*, on **April 4, 2010**. Co-sponsored by the Core Curriculum, this groundbreaking animated film was followed by a talkback conversation with the filmmaker. *Sita Sings the Blues* was written, directed, produced and animated by American artist Paley, and weaves an autobiographical story with events from the Hindu scriptural text the Ramayana. The feature length film uses music, shadow puppets and novel animation techniques to re-imagine the artist's experience through the lens of the god Rama's wife, Sita. The film was attended by close to 200 students, faculty and members of the public, and the Q&A that followed with the filmmaker featured many thoughtful and insightful questions about her creative process, future work, the process of adapting this scriptural work to the medium of film, and a discussion of her crusade against copyright restrictions, including why she chose to make *Sita Sings the Blues* an open-license work.