



## ***An Interfaith Artistic Endeavor***

*featuring The Rose Ensemble and guest musicians from the Middle East*

### ***From the Land of Three Faiths***

*Voices of Ancient Mediterranean Jews, Christians and Muslims*

#### **History/Background**

The Rose Ensemble started in 1994, primarily an early music group, performing a typical selection of pre-1750 Western European music. But over the past several years we have been fortunate to incorporate into our repertoire more non-traditional (Hawaiian, Mexican) and non-Western types of music such as Sephardic, Hispano-Arabic, Turkish, Arabic and even Bedouin vocal and instrumental music. It is this latter group that gave birth to a largely Abrahamic program called “From the Land of Three Faiths: Voices of Ancient Mediterranean Jews, Christians and Muslims.”

#### **Overview/Research**

As with every Rose Ensemble program, research and the thirst for knowledge played prominent roles in the development of “Three Faiths.” Our years of work has involved consulting with linguists, musicologists, ethnomusicologists and a host of experts with various religious affiliation and knowledge, as well as our insistence that we musicians receive special musical and language instruction. But perhaps even more important to note is that The Rose Ensemble’s continued exploration and development of this repertoire (almost ten years now) has been met with the same reverence for history, language and culture as any of our other programs. We are proud of what we have accomplished thus far and are encouraged by the number of performances we have been able to secure across the United States over the years. And the audience receptions and reactions have been incredibly positive. Concert-goers comment again and again that in a single Rose Ensemble performance, they learn more and receive more context about shared traditions and differences in Islam, Christianity and Judaism than years of Middle East news reports.

#### **Artistic Process**

one of the challenges in creating a musical program such as this, which focuses on the so-called “Land of Three Faiths” – music largely from Hispano-Arabic traditions, and which strives to represent equally the traditions of Christianity, Judaism and Islam – is the simple

fact that while the Christian and Jewish traditions provide scholars with an abundance of repertoire, there is, in stark contrast, no Islamic liturgical music, save the chanting of the Qur'an (which, we acknowledge, is not technically viewed as "music" in the Islamic tradition, and would nevertheless be inappropriate in a concert setting). The Rose Ensemble's approach to this thematic program, therefore, has been more about emphasizing the cultural, musical and linguistic exchanges and collaborations that took place among people of different faith traditions in medieval Spain and, in subsequent generations (post-Expulsion), throughout many parts of the Mediterranean. In some traditions, manuscript sources are available (although precise, historically accurate interpretation is difficult to claim); and in other traditions, generations of people have been responsible for the preservation of melodies and texts, through orally transmitted history and by means of collective memory, most notably during times of war and oppression.

## **Objectives**

Our goal is that audiences will be enlightened, with a greater knowledge of both world history and religious history, leaving Rose Ensemble performances with a sense that the lines between what traditionalists call "sacred" and "secular," what contemporary critics insist on labeling "folk" and "classical," and what modern society speaks of – at once synonymously and separately – as "Islamic" and "Arab," are very much blurred throughout history.

## **Project Worthiness**

"From the Land of Three Faiths: Voices of Ancient Mediterranean Jews, Christians and Muslims" highlights the Hispano-Arabic Middle Ages as both an important and devastating chapter of Judaic, Christian and Islamic history. In earlier times, having participated in the golden age of classical Arab culture in the Near East, Jews played an important role in Spain as mediators between Arab and Christian culture, and Jewish poetry and music consequently reached a new pinnacle. In the 13th and early-14th centuries, Jews and Arabs joined the troubadours from Spain, France and Portugal as musicians at the Castilian court. The famous *Cantigas de Santa Maria* (Songs of the Virgin Mary) of King Alfonso X (1252-84) show Arab and Christian musicians playing together and many *Cantigas* tell of Jewish and Muslim life and culture in Spain. At the court of Sancho IV, along with thirteen Christian and fifteen Arab musicians, the Jew Ismael played the rota and accompanied his wife when she danced. But as you know, in the 14th century, when the Catholic re-conquest of Spain made considerable progress, the co-habitation of Spanish Christians, Jews and Muslims began to crumble, and the persecutions of 1391 led to mass conversions of Jews and Muslims, followed by the expulsion of the Jews in 1492 and the final Muslim expulsion between 1609 and 1614.

## **Relevance/Timeliness**

The story continues, of course, as it is a story that survives in the vehicles of music and poetry. And it is in the spirit of this centuries-old sharing of songs, texts, traditions and cultures that we have an interest in expanding our touring program, “From the Land of Three Faiths: Voices of Ancient Mediterranean Jews, Christians and Muslims.” This expansion would be manifest in a number of ways, in terms of preparation, content, performances, outreach and performers. Our goal is to organize a substantial performance and residency tour in Minnesota (which could pave the way for a national tour), but the preparation and content for such a tour would be as unique as the project.

## **Project Synopsis**

The Rose Ensemble welcomes to Minnesota three guest musicians from different cultural and musical traditions and from different parts of the Mediterranean world (a Christian violinist from Lebanon; a Muslim Palestinian flute player; a Jewish-Israeli ‘ud player). These guest artists would join The Rose Ensemble for 1-2 weeks before the performance tour, in a series of learning and sharing sessions, in order to create/expand a program. The resulting repertoire (including the possibility of a new commissioned work) would then be taken on tour. The performances would take place in 10 cities throughout the state of Minnesota, and would feature performances and post-concert demonstrations of instruments/meet-greet with artists, in addition to public workshops and in-school performances for youth.