

## CityMusic Cleveland to present “Two Faiths: One Spirit” series

by Jarrett Hoffman



Next week, a series of concerts by CityMusic Cleveland, led by music director Avner Dorman, will aim to unite the Jewish and Arab communities, promote togetherness in Greater Cleveland, and emphasize the value of preserving the arts — regardless of culture. Titled “Two Faiths: One Spirit,” the series was inspired by stories of priceless religious texts that were rescued by people of other faiths.

The musical centerpiece of the series is Bosnian-born Merima Ključo’s *Sarajevo Haggadah: Music of the Book*, featuring the composer on solo accordion. The work will receive its world premiere in a new orchestrated version commissioned by CityMusic Cleveland.

Also included on the program are works by Kareem Roustom, Behzad Ranjbaran, Tom Cohen, and Josef Bardanashvili — composers whose roots stretch from Syria to Iran, Georgia, and Israel. Six free performances run from March 14-18 in Beachwood, Cleveland, Parma, Lakewood, and Elyria (see our [Concert Listings](#) for times and locations).

One layer of inspiration for the series comes from Pulitzer Prize-winning author Geraldine Brooks’ *People of the Book*. That historical novel attempts to trace the travels of the Sarajevo Haggadah, a 14th-century Jewish prayer book, from Medieval Spain to 20th-century Bosnia, where it was restored at the National Museum in Sarajevo. Along the way it was saved by such figures as a Catholic priest and a Muslim imam — who concealed the book in the waistband of his pants, brought it

home, and later hid it under the floorboards of a mosque to keep it safe from the Nazis.



Brooks' novel is what sparked Merima Ključo to write the original chamber version of *Sarajevo Haggadah: Music of the Book*, for accordion, piano, and video. (You can read our 2015 interviews with [Ključo](#) and [Brooks](#) at those links, or our [review](#) of the work's performance that year at the Cleveland Museum of Art.)

The other half of the inspiration for “Two Faiths: One Spirit” came from another historical novel — a parallel in some ways to Brooks' book. Joshua Hammer's *The Bad-Ass Librarians of Timbuktu* tells of a band of librarians in Mali who helped save a collection of ancient Islamic and secular manuscripts during Al Qaeda's invasion of the country in 2012. Providing funds for the rescue was scholar Henry Louis Gates Jr., who directs the Hutchins Center for African and African American Research at Harvard University, and who is a Protestant Christian.

In an email, CityMusic executive director Eugenia Strauss wrote, “I think what we are delivering is a unique and fascinating approach to building bridges among people and denominations through music. Cleveland is so very rich a melting pot of cultures and customs. I hope that will come across.”

In addition to the concerts, CityMusic Cleveland will be joining with local institutions to present an array of public workshops and discussion sessions on the consequences of racial and religious hatred. Those partners include the Maltz Museum of Jewish

Heritage, Cleveland Public Library, the Islamic Center of Cleveland, and Fairmount Temple.

Next week we'll talk to Merima Ključo and Avner Dorman.

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