

# Samuel Torjman Thomas, Ph.D

## Artist-Scholar

### Bio

**Dr. Samuel Torjman Thomas** is a professor of ethnomusicology and a professional performer (sax, clarinet, oud, nay flute, frame drums, and vocals), composer, and bandleader. Actively forging an artist/scholar model for over fifteen years, his work emphasizes Middle Eastern and North African cultures (Sephardi-Mizrahi studies in music, poetry, political history, and philosophy), worldwide Jewish musics, diaspora studies, improvisation, jazz studies, and American popular music.



Dr. Thomas is an adjunct Assistant Professor at several campuses of the City University of New York (Hunter College, John Jay College, and Brooklyn College) and at Montclair State University. He is the artistic director of **ASEFA** – the critically-acclaimed new music ensemble – and the **New York Andalus Ensemble** – a multi-ethnic ensemble featuring a choir and instrumentalists performing traditional musics of North Africa and Spain, in Arabic, Hebrew, and Spanish.

Dr. Thomas is a frequent guest lecturer, performer, and clinician, at universities, museums, in ecumenical spaces, and libraries. These programming options are very conducive for creating co-sponsorship opportunities between different academic departments and segments of the wider college community.

*Your appearance here, as soloist and with the ensemble, was nothing short of spectacular!*

*- Dr. Walter Clark, UC-Riverside*

## **Dr. Samuel Torjman Thomas: Sample Lectures and Performance Workshops**

### **“Maqam and Music”**

The Middle East and North Africa contain a rich array of *maqam-based* musical traditions, including different Classical, Light Classical, and Religious genres. Presented as a performance workshop, Thomas introduces several regional instruments and a discussion of important theoretical elements in the *maqam-based* music.

*(Additional musicians possible)*

### **“Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Improvisation”**

This lecture (or performance workshop) emphasizes the role and practice of improvisation in several distinguished and distinctive non-western (Arab, India, Sub-Saharan Africa) and western (jazz, fusion) musical traditions.

*(Additional musicians possible)*

### **“Global Music in America: Migration and Diaspora”**

Drawing upon social theories in globalization and diaspora studies, this lecture focuses on the transnational nature of American vernacular musics and highlights growing media for transactional musical cultures globally.

### **“Musical Intersections in Muslim and Jewish Cultures”**

Surveying a vast geographic and historical landscape – from North Africa to Central Asia and from the seventh to the twenty-first century – this lecture focuses on the role of music in fostering Judeo-Muslim approaches to ritual practice, philosophical and theological thought, and aesthetics. Thomas presents and contextualizes musical pieces from North Africa, the Levant, Iraq, and Turkey, and explores similarities in sacred-text cantillation practices of the *Torah* and *Qur’an*.

### **“Global Jazz: Incorporating Different Streams of Influence”**

Jazz history is replete with ways in which different musical traditions have come together to form the richest tapestry of artistic expression in America. This program explores the evolving tradition, at once canonized and on the move, by looking at moments in jazz history as well as a deeper dive into examples of cross-pollination in approaches to composition, improvisation, theory, and style.

### **“Deep Song: The Roots of Klezmer and Klezmerica”**

This performance workshop features an exploration of several aspects of Klezmer music, including instruments, repertoire, theory, and improvisational practice.

*(Additional musicians possible)*

### **“Performing Piyyutim”**

This masterclass features an in-depth look at the interaction between Arabic and Hebraic poetics developed in Andalusia and carried to the greater Mediterranean world. Ideas related to neoplatonism, humanism, and intercultural exchange in poetry and music are explored. Group participation is encouraged through learning songs together.

*(Additional musicians possible)*



## **Dr. Samuel Torjman Thomas: Concerts**

As artistic director of both *ASEFA* and the *New York Andalus Ensemble*, Thomas' concert performances can traverse a wide repertoire of traditional or jazz-infused pieces drawing inspiration from several Middle Eastern, North African, and jazz styles. Depending on the programming scope – audience, budget, context – the ensemble configurations range from three to ten musicians, including oud, vocals, saxophone, clarinet, guitar, violin, upright bass, hand percussion, and drumset. Songs feature Hebrew, Arabic, Spanish, and Ladino.

Please visit the websites below to learn more.



## **For Programming Inquiries:**

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*Thank you again for leading a wonderful workshop,  
and for your generosity towards our students!*

*- Dr. Julie Hunter, SUNY-Potsdam, Crane School of Music*