

Samuel Torjman Thomas

Samuel Torjman Thomas, PhD

Bio

Dr. Samuel Torjman Thomas teaches ethnomusicology and Sephardic Jewish Studies at City University of New York, and is a faculty member for both the ALEPH and Academy of Jewish Religion Cantorial Programs. His scholarship centers on Sephardic thought and culture, musical cultures of the Middle East and North Africa, Jewish musical traditions, and jazz-based traditions. Dr. Torjman Thomas is also Director of Musical Arts at Brooklyn's Sephardic Community Center (JCC).



Dr. Torjman Thomas is a multi-instrumentalist (saxophone, oud, nay), vocalist (Hebrew, Arabic, Spanish), and founder and artistic director of the **New York Andalus Ensemble** and the critically-acclaimed Sephardic-jazz ensemble **ASEFA**. His artistic work centers on performing musics of North Africa, the Middle East, and Global Jazz. He is a frequent guest speaker, ḥazzan, and facilitator in ecumenical spaces, cultural institutions, and music and spiritual retreats worldwide.

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

- Dr. Walter Clark, UC-Riverside

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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 examples of different musical traditions coming 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)*



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Concerts

As artistic director of several different groups, Samuel has the flexibility to program whichever music ensemble best fits the bill. He has performance groups that range from 2-20 performers, depending on the programming scope – audience, budget, context. Often concerts are combined with a pre-concert performance workshop, offering an insightful look into the musical, textual, and creative elements underlying the performances.



Pricing

Pricing depends on whether programming includes more than one individual, and the length of the programming. Specific quotes are best developed in consultation.

Past speaking and performing tour events have been hosted in ecumenical spaces of all different religions and denominations, as well as university and community organizations. We encourage co-sponsorship events to spread the costs and responsibilities.



Here is what we ask of our event hosts:

- Agreed upon honorarium
- A primary contact to be responsible for the event and for Samuel while in the area.
- Accommodations, meals, and local transportation for the speaker (home hospitality is great!)

For Inquiries:

Hayley Jonas, *Booking Assistant*
me@samueltorjmanthomas.com | 917.620.4055



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

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

Testimonials

"Dr. Samuel Torjman Thomas and Asefa lit up Vassar College with the very best combination of passionate musicianship and thoughtful and insightful commentary and analysis. Asefa should by all means be your go-to ensemble for Jewish-Arab fusion — once you've experienced them you will be completely drawn in by the seamless and felicitous marriage they effect, not only between cultures and their musical heritage, but between the educational and the performative. With Asefa, the educational is never dry and the performative encompasses both heart and head. Mabruk! Mazal Tov!"

- Dr. Marc Michael Epstein, Chair Judaic Studies, Vassar College

"Thank you for coming to the Magnes at UC Berkeley, to present your research and repertoire connected to Moroccan Jewish music in North Africa and throughout the global diaspora. The wealth of information you presented strongly resonated with the audience, allowing for a wealth of trans-cultural connections to emerge."

- Dr. Francesco Spagnolo, Magnes Museum, UC-Berkeley

"Dr. Samuel Torjman Thomas's visit to the UCLA Herb Alpert School of Music was a full display of his teaching mastery, scholar expertise in Moroccan Jewish liturgical music and his fine musicianship. Traveling in Pairs presented a musically rich encounter of many Jewish traditions filtered through a modern musical lens."

- Dr. Mark Kligman, Mickey Katz Endowed Chair in Jewish Music, UCLA; Director of Lowell Milken Fund for American Jewish Music

"Recently, Dr. Samuel Torjman Thomas came to our community as a scholar-in-residence and was a spectacular presenter on the heritage of Jews in the Middle East and of Sephardic descent as well as being an expert on the oud. He is a topnotch musician and historian and he consistently added so much to our community throughout the weekend, not only with his talent and knowledge, but also with the strongest of charisma. His presentations are of the highest quality and very accessible."

- Cantor Ben Rosner, Mosaic Law Congregation, Sacramento, CA

"Dr. Samuel Torjman Thomas provided a riveting experience for my congregation from beginning to end. After leading an exotic and engaging Friday night service, he gave a fascinating talk. His down-to-earth delivery about the history and relevance of Andalusian Spain belies the depth of his scholarship in this area as well as his musicianship. He brought several members of his group, ASEFA, for an electrifying Saturday evening of Sephardic music that left my congregants longing for more. All in all, we couldn't have asked for a better experience for our first-ever musical scholar-in-residence Shabbaton."

- Cantor Mike Weis, Brotherhood Synagogue, New York, NY

"I just wanted to tell you again how beautiful the concert was that you presented in our ProSeries. And your guest lecture to our music faculty and students, in our 'Out of Bounds' series, is still being talked about. Thank you so much."

- Prof. Eric Platz, Brandon University, Brandon, Canada
