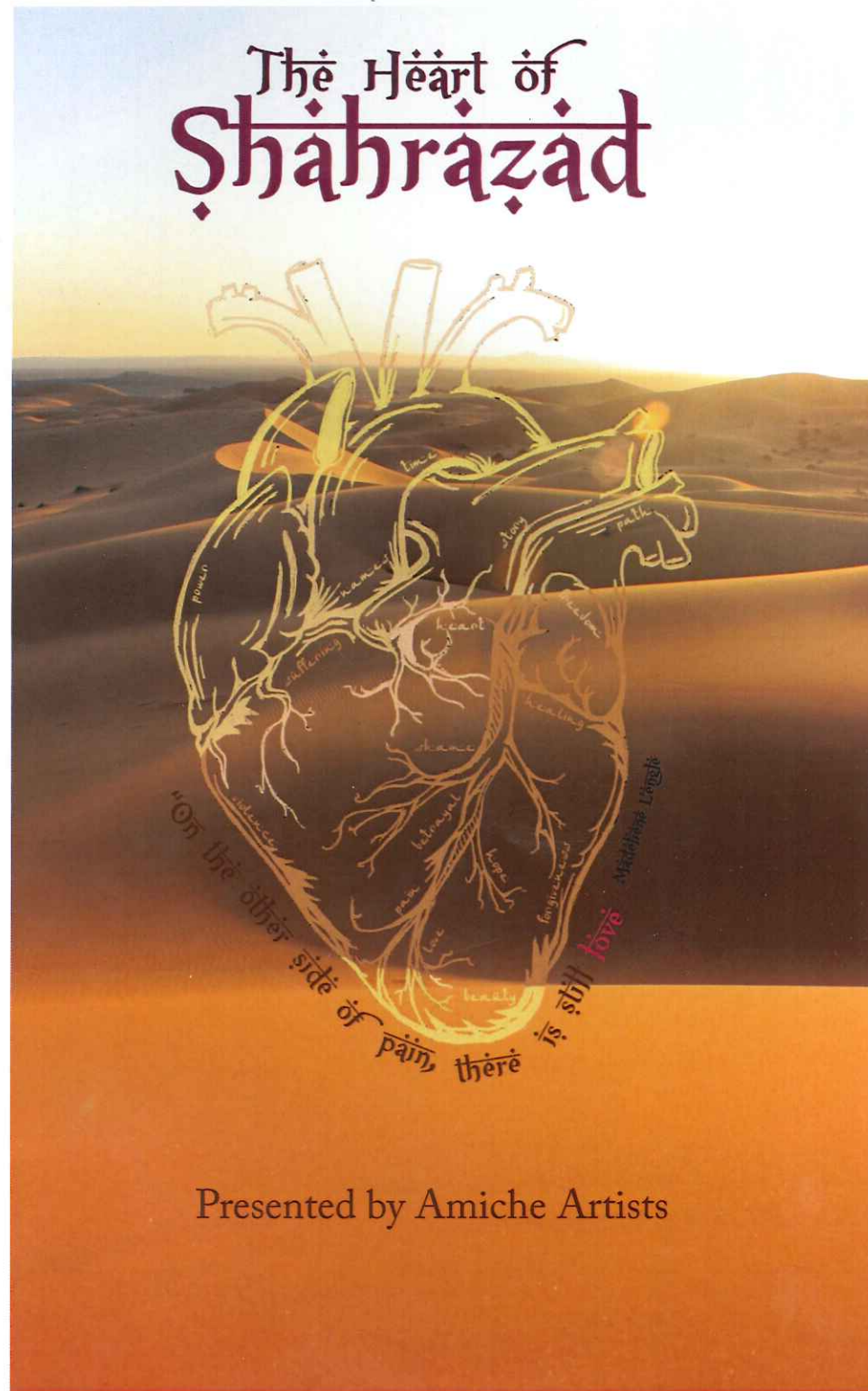




Amiche (Noun) Italian Women Friends. Amiche emerged from a friendship and a mutual love of creating. It is through this merging of two fields, opera and acting, that we have learned the beauty of bringing together unexpected connections, both in art and friendship. It is our hope that through our work others will be inspired to share their passions with the world and create unexpected connections – Lara Lynn Cottrill and Sarah Carleton

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# The Heart of Shāhrazād

Written by Sarah Carleton

Composed by Eliane Aberdam

Produced and directed by Amiche Artists

## Cast

Shahrazad.....Sarah Carleton

Story .....Lara Lynn Cottrill

Harpist.....Marissa Knaub

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## About

Last year, as we were discussing our next project, we kept coming back to our love of stories and the stories we grew up with. In one of our brainstorming sessions, *One Thousand and One Nights* came into the conversation, and we were particularly intrigued by the character of Shahrazad, the storyteller of these numerous tales. The more we imagined the nature of her personal story, the more we saw a story from the past that had so much to say about our current world and those who currently live in the midst of violence. The news is often filled with stories of violence, both locally and around the world, from rape to domestic violence, from kidnappings to human trafficking. And though violence impacts everyone, women bear the primary brunt of violence in our world. This performance wrestles with what we do when we live in the midst of violence or have been the recipient of violence.

Fred Rogers once said, "When I was a boy and I would see scary things in the news, my mother would say to me, 'Look for the helpers. You will always find people helping.'" We believe stories matter, the stories we tell and the ones we write with our lives. It is our hope that this performance connects our audience with their own stories, but also reminds us of the helpers in the world who are bringing light to the dark places of violence.

## Synopsis of *The Heart of Shāhrazād*

The character, Story, begins the performance, setting the stage for the story that will unfold. Portrayed by soprano Lara Lynn Cottrill, the character of Story represents the inspiration and muse of stories and the ways stories can touch our lives. Story also acts as a witness to the life of Shahrazad, as portrayed by actress Sarah Carleton. Closely linked to the role of Story is the music of the harp, played by Marissa Knaub, the underlying pulse and heart of the performance, taking us through the passage of time and stories.

### Scene I - Shahrazad's Home

Shahrazad enters the home where she lives with her father, a viceroy to the Sultan of the land. She enters carrying a package of books that her father brought back from one of his many travels for the Sultan. Her collections of stories from various places and peoples have become her dearest treasure and delight, as she shares them with her family and friends.

Her reading is interrupted by the delivery of a letter from Zurafa, a close friend who has been like a sister to Shahrazad.

Zurafa's letter contains shocking news, as she relays a conversation she overheard between the Sultan and Shahrazad's father. Overwhelmed with the news, Shahrazad goes in search of her father.

As Shahrazad leaves, Story moves about the stage and turns the hourglass, a symbol of the time that has passed.

### Scene II – Shahrazad's Home – Three Years Later

Three years have passed, and Shahrazad's life has drastically changed in this time. Her daily life includes writing down the names of each woman who has been killed by the Sultan. As she writes down each name and each name's meaning, she finds herself in a state of numb reflection, until she has to write down the name of her friend Zurafa who has just been killed. The death of someone close and dear to her turns her numbness to rage.

As she wrestles with her anger, the character of Story tries to help her see past her hate and nudges her towards the stories she has loved in the past.

Shahrazad begins to slowly be moved by Story, and in her desperation to do something, she decides that she will try to tell the Sultan a story. She prepares to see the Sultan and to offer a story as her last gift to her friend Zurafa and as a way to honor her life and love of beauty.

### Scene III – The Palace

As Shahrazad offers herself to the Sultan, Story reminds us of the importance of stories and the courage it takes to tell them.

Shahrazad asks the Sultan if she can tell him a story. When he grants her permission, she begins to weave together a story, and within the story she places her friend Zurafa as the princess, honoring her beauty and life.

As dawn appears, the Sultan agrees to let Shahrazad live so that he can hear more.

### Scene IV – The Palace – One Year Later

Time passes, and a year later Shahrazad is still alive and telling stories. She enters with her newborn infant, sharing her love of stories with her young son.

### Scene V – The Palace – Two Years Later

Three years have gone by since Shahrazad entered the palace, and she finds herself out of stories to tell. Story encourages Shahrazad to share her own story. As Shahrazad makes the choice to reveal her own story, she begins to reflect on her own heart and struggle with forgiveness.

As Shahrazad writes down her story, Story turns to the audience reminding us of our own stories and the power they can hold in the ways we tell them and write them.

## Musical selections and song texts

### Introduction

#### *Story Theme*

### Scene I – Shahrazad's Home

*Song of Songs* – Excerpts from Song of Songs in the Old Testament

### Passage of Time

### Scene II – Shahrazad's Home – Three Years Later

*The Lost Ones* – Names of the women who have been killed, along with the meanings their names carry.

#### *Listen to the Pain* –

These pains you feel are messengers. Listen to them.  
Look at your eyes. They are small,  
But they see enormous things.  
In your light I learn how to love.  
In your beauty, how to make poems.  
You dance inside my chest,  
where no one sees you,  
but sometimes I do,  
and that sight becomes this art.  
Drum sound rises on the air,  
its throb, my heart.  
A voice inside the beat says,  
I know you're tired,  
but come. This is the way.

If you could untie your wings and free your soul of hatred  
You and everyone around you would fly up like doves.  
Wherever you are, and whatever you do, be in love.  
Raise your words, not voice. It is rain that grows flowers, not thunder.  
When you do things from your soul, you feel a river moving in you, a joy.  
*Selections from Rumi's poems.*

### Scene III – The Palace

#### *Offering* -

To those who dare to tell stories  
Carrying deep within the seeds of love.

Speak stories of courage  
Face hatred with cunning  
Face hardness with love.  
Fight the darkness with truth.

Breathe life in the face of death  
Face fear with an open heart.  
With gentle strength  
Break down hatred and pain  
May your stories take you to the other side of pain  
The place where love is found.

### Passage of Time

### Scene IV – A Year Later

#### *Lullaby*-

Close your eyes gently  
Give your cold hands  
Hide your innocent heart  
Quietly sleep in this world like you are in a bottomless, deep well,  
fading from consciousness, falling through soft cotton.  
Follow this dream world to the bottomless well.  
Hushaby. Follow this dream world.  
Sleep angel. Sleep in the quiet darkness.

*Lyrics by Toygar Isikli*

*Translation from Turkish by Sarah Carleton and Lara Lynn Cottrill*

### Passage of Time

## Scene V – Two Years Later

### *Heart Song -*

How shall I free myself  
From love's hidden torments  
When they have become my heart's  
joys  
And its only choice?

I have hidden my heart in vain  
Behind a veil,  
My passion for you has torn the veil  
And seized the heart.

My honor complains  
Over such a demanding love,  
But you are the gift  
Or the enemy to fear.

Love was rendering everything blurry,  
And my eyes were drowning in tears  
Which were blinding me.

Other times, the water would with-  
draw,  
And again I could see.  
No, these are not tears  
That are pouring down from my eyes,  
But a soul that is gradually dripping!

These are not tears that are pouring  
Down from my eyes.  
But a soul  
That is gradually dripping.  
Excerpts from *Majnun and Leyla*

### *Healing Song*

Carry this song in our hearts.  
Live stories of healing in your cities  
In your homes.

Tell your stories.  
Full of love and life  
Let the bitterness melt away.  
Push back death.

Listen to the pain.  
Find your wounds and heal.

For the freedom of our cities.  
The freedom of our hearts.

Embody stories of love with your lives.  
That we may find love on the other side of pain.

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Song of Solomon, New International Version.

### **Listen to the Pain:**

Rumi, Jalal ad-Din. *The Essential Rumi*. Trans. Coleman Banks and John Moyne. San Francisco: Harper, 2004.

### **Heart Song:**

ibn al-Mulawwah ibn Muzahim, Qays. *Arabic Love Poetry from the Desert: Majnun Leyla*. Trans. Joyce Akesson. Lund: Pallas Athena, 2012.

### **Lullaby:**

Lyrics by Toygar Isikli – Translation from Turkish

## Thank you to our Thursday night panel members...

Beth Docherty - Board President at Pittsburgh Action Against Rape (PAAR)  
Joanne Martin, LCSW - Interim Executive Director at The Lazarus Center  
Esther L. Meek, Ph.D. - Professor of Philosophy at Geneva College and Visiting Professor of Apologetics at Redeemer Seminary in Dallas, TX.  
Amanda Ludwig –Counselor for the Allegheny Prison System  
Valerie Fulmer - Director for the Standardized Patient Program for the University of Pittsburgh's School of Medicine  
Michael Madonia- Director of Clinical Services at Pittsburgh Action Against Rape (PAAR).

## Thank you to our ARTISTS...

Christine Kroger – Artist for the List of Names of Women  
Arianna Carleton – Assistant Costume designer and creator  
Sombre Carleton – Assistant with Props  
Heather Greco— Creator and donor of custom designed pillows  
Kayla Haberbern – Assisted with choreography - The Heart Song dance  
Doug McGill – Poster Design

## Thank you to our DONORS...

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## A special and HUGE thank you to...

Mary Dell Brady and the beautiful Mansions on Fifth  
Eliane Aberdam—our wonderful composer

## Biographies

**Eliane Aberdam** (composer) was born in Nancy, France. As a child, she studied piano and theory at the Conservatoire National de Région in Grenoble.

She did her undergraduate studies in composition at the Rubin Academy of Music and Dance in Jerusalem. In 1989, she entered the graduate program at the University of Pennsylvania where she studied with George Crumb, and obtained her Master degree in 1992. She completed her Ph.D. in Composition at U.C. Berkeley.

Her works are performed in Israel, France and the United States. She attended music festivals such as The Bartok Seminar in Hungary, June in Buffalo, the Acadmie d't in Paris, and Voix Nouvelles in Royaumont (France). In 1995, she was selected by IRCAM for the Annual Course in electronic music, and for the commission of "PaRDeS", an electro-acoustic work for chamber ensemble and electronics.

In 2000, the Ensemble Intercontemporain (Paris) commissioned and premiered the chamber orchestra piece "Quoi? Ce point." (after Primo Levi's semi-autobiographic novel "Periodic Table") Her piece for band DOn't quIT, commissioned by the music department at George Washington University, was premiered in February 2002. In September 2003, her trio "Sans faiblir la nuit attend le soleil" was premiered in Grenoble by the trio ASSIEME, during the annual festival of Jewish culture, organized by the Cercle Bernard Lazare - Grenoble.

She has recently completed an opera, Tamar, (libretto by Maurya Simon) premiered in March 2007).

She is now teaching composition and theory at the University of Rhode Island. Learn more at: [composer.aberdam.com](http://composer.aberdam.com)

**Marissa Knaub** (harpist) is a frequent soloist and orchestra member throughout Pennsylvania, Ohio, and West Virginia. In 2014, she played *The Fantasticks* and *Merry Widow* with the Opera Theater of Pittsburgh's "Summerfest." She recently played Tchaikovsky's *Nutcracker* with the *Concert Artists' of Baltimore* and *Moscow Ballet*.

She performs regularly with the *Edgewood Symphony* and *Alia Musica* in Pittsburgh as well as with the *Youngstown Symphony* and *Wheeling Symphony*. She was a special guest performer at the *American Harp Society Conference* in New York City. She was the principal harpist of the *Firelands Symphony* in Sandusky, Ohio.

She held harp teaching positions with the *Urban Youth Harp Ensemble* in Atlanta, GA, at *Toccoa Falls University*, and *Young Artists' Harp Seminar*. Currently, Marissa teaches harp at *Youngstown State University* and maintains a private harp teaching studio for students of all ages.

For more information visit: [soundofeleganceharpist.com](http://soundofeleganceharpist.com)

**Sarah Carleton** (actress) In 2009 Sarah completed an MFA degree in performance from the University of Louisville, where she was able to focus on Shakespeare and multicultural theater, including studying in the University of Louisville's African American Theater Program.

Sarah's work has combined an interest in cultural studies and stories through creating performance pieces that address topics such as adoption, race, human trafficking, and healing. Her work has been performed at adoption seminars and on college campuses.

Her work in film includes work with local filmmakers on several independent projects, including *Undue Process*, for which she won a best supporting actress for the 2013 Cleveland 48HR Film Project and *Transistor*, for which she won Best Actress for the Cleveland 48HR Film Project in 2011.

Find out more at: [Sarahbcarleton.com](http://Sarahbcarleton.com)

**Lara Lynn Cottrill** (soprano) Described as "a voice of size, clarity and wide coloristic range... a three-dimensional figure who combined vulnerability with strength and tugged at the heartstrings in her every breath and movement..." (Pittsburgh Post Gazette 2013), Ms. Cottrill most recently performed Alice Front in the world premiere of *A New Kind of Fallout* with Opera Theater Summerfest in July. Other recent role debuts include Donna Anna in *Don Giovanni* with Opera Western Reserve and Pamina in *The Magic Flute* with Undercroft Opera. During Opera Theater of Pittsburgh's 2013 season, Ms. Cottrill portrayed Antonia in *Tales of Hoffmann* and Mamah in *Shining Brow*. She covered Frasquita in *Carmen* as an Apprentice Artist with Sarasota Opera and performed The Foreign Women in Menotti's *The Consul* with Opera New Jersey.

Lara graduated with her master's from Eastman School of Music and her bachelor's from University of Miami. Her recital and competition appearances include the eastern United States, San Francisco, Portland, Coeur d'Alene, Italy, Austria, and South Africa.

For more information visit: [Laralynncottrillsoprano.com](http://Laralynncottrillsoprano.com)



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