

Asian Arts & Culture Program Series



NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

CONTACT: Sue McFarland, 413-577-2486
aacp@acad.umass.edu

WHAT: Myth of Gilgamesh with Music by Simon Shaheen &
Qantara Ensemble

WHEN: Friday, November 14, 2008, at 8:00pm

WHERE: UMass Bowker Auditorium

TICKETS: Fine Arts Center Box Office 545-2511/ 1-800-999-UMAS

Join us for an evening of hauntingly beautiful Arabic music by Grammy-nominated composer **Simon Shaheen** and hear the world's oldest story told by well-known actor/storyteller **Margaret Olivia Wolfson** as the two present a new retelling of the ancient classical myth **Gilgamesh** with **Qantara Ensemble** on Friday, **November 14, at 8PM in Bowker Auditorium**. While Wolfson draws the audience into the ancient past of Iraq with her mesmerizing voice and stage effects, renowned Palestinian-American musician Shaheen and his Qantara Ensemble will perform dazzling rhythms and haunting melodies on the **oud** (Arabian lute), violin, **ney** (Arabian flute), and world percussion.

Considered one of the world's great masterpieces, the **Epic of Gilgamesh**, with its central themes of hubris and its consequences, friendship, love, grief, and redemption, holds great resonance in our own times. Originally inscribed on stone tablets in the ancient city of Uruk—today's Iraq—the saga tells of King Gilgamesh's otherworldly journey in search of immortality after losing his beloved

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friend, Enkidu. Much like Homer's *Odyssey*, this timeless story is filled with an amazing cast of characters, each one brought vividly to life by actor/storyteller Wolfson.

Margaret Olivia Wolfson, a solo theater artist, writer, and founder of World Myth and Music, has collaborated with musicians for more than 20 years, performing in such places as Kennedy Center, the Sydney Opera House, the National Theater, Harvard, Princeton, the United Nations, and other venues. Her previous music-drama collaboration with Simon Shaheen, *Majnun Layla*, received widespread critical acclaim at its opening at the Kennedy Center and nearly two-year run. In 2007, Wolfson worked with Shaheen and the world-renowned poet, Adonis, to present a collage of his poetry in English and Arabic with musical accompaniment. In addition to her performance work, Wolfson is an award-winning author of four books. *Marriage of the Rain Goddess* won a United Kingdom Reading Association Award for substantial contribution to literature, and her work *Mother of Beauty* was nominated for a Pushcart Editor's Choice Award in 2007.

Simon Shaheen, a music composer, performer, and educator has appeared in sold-out performances at Carnegie Hall, Kennedy Center, Cairo's Opera House, Theatre de la Ville in Beirut, and Belgium's Le Palais des Arts, among others. He has released five bestselling albums, including *Blue Flame*, which was nominated for eleven Grammy Awards. As a recipient of the prestigious National Heritage Award, Shaheen has been honored at the White House, and as a composer, he has received grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, the New York State Council on the Arts, Meet the Composer, the Jerome Foundation, Continental Harmony, and Yellow Springs Institute. In addition to his recorded work, Shaheen's theatrical repertoire includes *Majnun Layla*, *The Book and the Stranger*, *Possible City*, and *Collateral Damage* with actress Vanessa Redgrave.

A performance to remember long after the curtain comes down!

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