



# SHANGHAI SONATAS

A NEW MUSICAL

**Concept and Music** by Xiang “Sean” Gao

**Book** by Alan Goodson

**Lyrics** by Joyce Hill Stoner

[masterplayers.udel.edu/shanghai](http://masterplayers.udel.edu/shanghai)

[shanghaiasonatas.com](http://shanghaiasonatas.com)

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*A Jewish Ghetto violin magically brings Benny to a  
Shanghai nightclub of the 1930s*



## MISSION STATEMENT

Through musical theater and classical music, the **Shanghai Sonatas** production team hopes to promote cultural exchange and racial equity among all people while bringing Jewish and Asian-American race relations into focus. The new musical sheds a light on a little-known part of our history and reminds people of the tragic crimes against humanity that occurred during the Holocaust a little more than 75 years ago. **Shanghai Sonatas** is also supported by customized educational presentations and exhibitions that live beyond the stage to maximize its impact on the community.

*Song, "The Year of the Underdog," Jewish musicians  
playing in a Shanghai nightclub in 1939*



## ABOUT *SHANGHAI SONATAS*

History books recount many facts of hard-fought battles, appalling atrocities across nations and extraordinary acts of heroism from ordinary people during World War II. But less commonly known is a story of music shining a light during a dark time, bridging cultural gaps and building a foundation for classical music education and talent for generations to come.

Entering its fourth year of creative process, *Shanghai Sonatas* shares memoirs of Jewish classical musicians who escaped Nazi Germany and found refuge in Shanghai in the 1930s, and the Chinese who welcomed the immigrants to Shanghai. These refugees used music, the universal language, to help them survive the war in a strange new place; they also connected with their new neighbors through music and educated the first generation of Chinese classical musicians.

The musical depicts a historical moment of diversity, equity, inclusion, tolerance, and cultural exchange. People with different cultural backgrounds find unity through powerful stories and songs as well as live instrumental music in classical, jazz, traditional Chinese, and Jewish music genres.

Today, as a legacy of the Jewish refugee musicians and other musicians before and after them, there are 60 million classical musicians worldwide who are either from China or Taiwan, or of Chinese descent, making classical music a new Chinese tradition and cultural identity in modern history. The Juilliard School opened its only overseas campus in China in 2019, while the Philadelphia Orchestra now tours China annually, having been the first Western orchestra to visit China in 1973. *Shanghai Sonatas*' true stories connect the dots between the success of current Chinese musicians and the contributions of the Jewish refugee musicians 75 years ago.

For **Xiang “Sean” Gao**, the producer and composer of *Shanghai Sonatas*, who conceptualized the musical based on historical facts, this is a personal story. His grandfather was among the Chinese classical musicians influenced by the Jewish refugees, starting the family's path of musical success and Gao's ultimate status as one of the most successful violinists and pedagogues in America. He is now the **Trustees Distinguished Professor of Music at the University of Delaware** and a recipient of the Delaware Governor's Award in the Arts.

*Violin student Ming Kai and his mother Tan Hua, the Peking opera star*



## SYNOPSIS

While traveling in Shanghai, Chinese-American violinist Benny Dao discovers restored violins from the Jewish Ghetto of Shanghai that, when played, transport him back to Japanese-occupied Shanghai from the 1930s to 1945 when the American and Chinese armies liberated the city. He follows the wartime experience of some of the musicians among the 20,000 Jewish refugees in exile there who trained the first generation of Chinese classical musicians, including Benny's own relatives. Benny, as an immigrant struggling to create a balance between two cultures, is empowered by music to find his sense of cultural belonging.

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## THE STORY CONTINUES

Our ultimate dream is to build *Shanghai Sonatas* into a full musical theatre production touring nationally, working with an acclaimed regional theatre company, and leading to its Broadway premiere. Philanthropic support for areas such as community engagement activities, choreography, projection art, scenic design and workshops will help make the dream a reality.

In addition, donor investment will enable the trained musicians in the future cast to use stringed instruments that once belonged to Holocaust victims. These rare violins were collected and restored by Israeli violin makers Amnon and Avshi Weinstein, whose “Violins of Hope” collection continues to serve as a memorial to the musicians and others who were lost, including 400 of their own relatives.

Please consider supporting *Shanghai Sonatas*, providing necessary resources to create the full experience, even more appropriately honoring the legacy of the Jewish refugees and their Chinese students. Please find contact information on the back cover.

*Song “Crossing the Garden Bridge,” as the Jews dream of the free world outside the ghetto*





*Song, "We can never turn the clock back," as the Jews read the short list of European Jewish survivors from the Red Cross*

## COLLABORATORS

- Violins of Hope Collection\*
- Yangtze Repertory Theatre of America (NYC)
- Shanghai Jewish Refugees Museum
- United States Holocaust Memorial Museum
- University of Delaware Jewish Studies Program
- The Jewish Federation of Greater Phoenix
- Sophie Fetthauer, University of Hamburg research scholar of Shanghai Jewish refugee musicians
- Betty Grebenschikoff, a 92 year-old Shanghai Jewish Ghetto survivor and author

\*Additional support would enable the trained musicians in the future cast to use stringed instruments that once belonged to Holocaust victims. These rare violins were collected and restored by Israeli violin makers Amnon and Avshi Weinstein, whose "Violins of Hope" collection continues to serve as a memorial to the musicians and others who were lost, including 400 of their own relatives.

## EDUCATIONAL OFFERINGS

Pending support, associated educational activities would include webinars and exhibitions of artifacts from the Shanghai Ghetto featuring museum curators, historians, Shanghai Jewish Ghetto survivors, and performing & visual artists from the U.S., Asia, Israel and Europe. Audiences will have the opportunity to connect virtually with behind-the-scenes creative activities and in-depth conversations with the creative and academic forces behind *Shanghai Sonatas*.

*Song "Liberation," as the American and Chinese armies liberate Shanghai from the occupying Japanese Army*



# HOW TO SUPPORT

We look forward to exploring customized sponsorship opportunities and working to recognize your support in a meaningful way.

For more information on how to support this musical, please contact John Shipman, Director of Development for the University of Delaware College of Arts and Sciences, at [jshipman@udel.edu](mailto:jshipman@udel.edu) or 302-831-7166.

[www.masterplayers.udel.edu](http://www.masterplayers.udel.edu)

## TRAILER

[bit.ly/shanghaiasonatas](https://bit.ly/shanghaiasonatas)



*Curtain call following the 2020 workshop performance at the University of Delaware Master Players Concert Series*



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