



## **The Sound World of The Wedding**

Founded in 2001, Gecko is an award-winning and internationally acclaimed physical theatre company, led by Artistic Director Amit Lahav. With an expanding ensemble of international performers and makers, we aim to create world-class work through experimentation, collaboration and play. Gecko shows are visceral, visual treats combining impressive technical design with striking movement and multiple languages to communicate with our audiences.

Our work engages audiences on an emotional level. We explore universal human experiences with the ambition that each person's response to the shows will be a personal one, linked to their own life's journey, and therefore different from the other audience members around them.

*The Wedding* is inspired by the complexities of human nature: love and anger, creation and destruction, community and isolation. In a blur of wedding dresses and contractual obligations, our extraordinary ensemble guides audiences through a dystopian world in which we are all brides, wedded to society. But what are the terms of this relationship? And can we consider a divorce?

We create our shows across three years, and each element of the production plays an equally important role. The choreography, set, lighting, sound and music all work together to tell the story.

“A Gecko show is a viscerally felt, sensorial experience coalescing visual, physical and sonic layers to create our Gecko world. Whilst making the shows, alongside a list of scenes, the storyboarding of sound is as close as I get to having a script. The sound and lighting score directs the audiences attention and suggests an emotional narrative. For this reason I have worked very closely with longtime collaborator Dave Price to craft this essential element of the productions.” – **Amit Lahav, Artistic Director of Gecko and Creator of The Wedding**

The soundscape to *The Wedding* contains a rich mix of sourced music pertinent to the world of the production, combined with a specially created soundtrack unique to the show. Since Gecko’s first show in 2001, we have worked with composer Dave Price who has developed an intimate relationship and working method with the company, which allows him to create original music that perfectly suits the narrative and emotional tone of the piece. *The Wedding* is a big show with a culturally significant story and the sound and music have an epic, cinematic quality that helps articulate and expand the narrative, gluing everything together.

## **Voices & Languages**

Multiple spoken languages are used by the performers throughout the show, but are not the main method of storytelling. In fact, no audience member will understand all the dialogue spoken in our shows as so many different languages are used.

Language becomes an equal layer of the soundscape with the intention of aiding the emotion of a scene rather than defining narrative or meaning. Often words are muttered or sentences are left incomplete. With an ensemble of nine international performers in *The Wedding*, this also brings with it the largest selection of different languages of any Gecko show so far.

The following languages are spoken in *The Wedding*, some by native speakers and some that have been learnt specifically for the role: Basque, Serbian, Cantonese, Norwegian, English, French, Spanish, Arabic, Georgian, German, Welsh, Russian and Esperanto. Some performers use more than one language within the show, as many perform multiple roles. Another trait of Gecko’s performance style is the use of breath as a way of portraying emotion to support the narrative.

## Music and Compositional Themes

The narrative moves between various characters and worlds. There are distinct musical themes which help to drive the choreography and propel the story of each character forwards.

The show starts with the sound of a mother giving birth. Before this baby emerges onto the stage as an adult, the sound of their journey from baby crying to children playing to adult voice echoes around the auditorium.

### Some of the original music themes are:



### Wedding Ceremonies

As the adult characters are 'born' onto the stage, they are initiated into an authoritarian office world via a wedding ceremony. The other ensemble performers welcome the new arrival, using their voices to celebrate a new colleague.

During the show's development, a key area of exploration was the ceremony of weddings across different cultures and geographical areas. The rituals of a wedding carries a strong sense of identity and import.

The show features a Jewish wedding for which clarinet maestro Dave Shulman was recorded to get the authentic Klezmer sound, and an Eastern European or Georgian wedding featuring the sounds of the cimbalom, fiddle and accordion.

### Office World

Having arrived, characters take their place in a stylised office world. Strong driving drums and percussive accents suggest the rigidity of the system the characters are swept up in, with choreography tightly set to the musical beats. There is also a playfulness to a lot of the music in these scenes which contrasts with the sense of repression and the demands of working life.



The soundscape includes recorded sounds typical of an office such as typing and phones ringing. Our performers use their voices to imply interactions between office workers.

## Robin's World

This character's troubled theme includes monotonous piano and ominous strings, suggesting a man stuck in a rut.

Violin and viola played with techniques such as 'sul ponticello' (on the bridge) and 'sul tasto' (on the fingerboard) give a heightened tension to the music despite a relative simplicity. Everything keeps moving around Robin, but he is struggling emotionally and the performer uses his voice to express feelings of frustration and anger.



In the second scene exploring Robin's world, the piano part is reduced putting more emphasis on the ominous strings that echo the ticking of a clock, implying the character has fallen even further into emotional turmoil.

## Immigrant World



The world of the immigrant family features the Ethiopian musician and vocalist Temesgen Zeleke and Oud player Frank Moon.

One scene in the show depicts the family recounting the harrowing journey they have undertaken. Great care was taken to make a track that fulfilled the theatrical requirement of the scene whilst trying to remain sensitive to the subject matter. It felt very important for

a beautiful soulful voice to be used during this part of the story to represent the spirit and inner strength of the immigrant family. The soulful lament of Temesgen's voice is contrasted by frantic stressful voices of the performers on stage.

There is humour in this part of the story as well, which contrasts with the overall narrative of the immigrant family. When Khalid first enters the stage, he does so carrying a small portable radio that plays a recording of the performer's voice singing intentionally silly melodies, to which he playfully responds with humorous movement to charm the audience.

## End Song

The aim for the end of the show was to express the central idea of community and hope for the future; to be something uplifting and inspiring that could reach into the hearts of everyone who sees the show anywhere in the world.

Rhythmic clapping patterns came from the idea to create a distinctive cadence that is heard at points during the show to represent the growing spirit of change. It is present during the scenes with Sophie & Stephanie, the lead revolutionaries of the story, and is heard as a percussive layer at various points. This culminates in the final song where the full company sing, stamp, clap and shout in interlocking patterns, building to all-encompassing crescendo.

## Recording the Music

“When writing the original music, I decided to begin each theme by improvising with a selected instrument. Once I had found a way in I would expand the idea and develop the arrangement. This helped me to connect to the ideas in an emotional way, allowing me to use my instincts - something I rely on throughout a creative process. Once the tracks were developed, I focused on production, bringing in other musicians to contribute their parts.” – **Dave Price, Composer for The Wedding**

For the compositional themes discussed previously, Dave recorded the music in a carefully considered manner appropriate for the needs of each theme.

For example, Temesgen has a unique voice, humble yet with great emotional depth and a beautifully distinctive way of embellishing a phrase. The piece written for the immigrant’s journey was almost complete when Temesgen came into the studio to record. To capture the vocal, Dave gave Temesgen some English words to draw on and he improvised to the track in his native Amharic language. In this way they gradually developed his vocal contributions.

The second track featuring Temesgen’s vocals towards the end of the show again saw him using Dave’s English lyrics as a point of departure. However, on this occasion, Temesgen began by improvising a song using his Krar (an Ethiopian lyre) as accompaniment but finally recorded the song without the Krar and the track was re-built around this unaccompanied vocal.

For the final song in the show, Dave spent time researching historical, political protests from around the world and collecting slogans. Using these as a springboard, he wrote the song lyrics, which were then translated into Esperanto, a modern constructed language specifically created in 1887 to foster harmony between people from different countries. The word Esperanto translates as “one who hopes” and this perfectly connected with what we wanted this song to do. Ian Carter and Andrew Marshall from the Esperanto Association of Britain generously supported Dave in the translation.



## Sourced Music

The back of the stage has a raised world in which people seem to sit above the slog of everyday existence. These scenes are accompanied by classical opera music, which accentuates the difference between their world and the rest of the show.

Another sourced piece, performed by The Yuval Ron Ensemble (a music and dance group which ‘endeavors to alleviate national, racial, religious and cultural divides by uniting the music and dance of the people of the Middle East into a unique mystical, spiritual and inspiring musical celebration), is used in a series of scenes where Sophie, the revolutionary, is discovering her inner passion. As well as being a beautiful piece of music, the group’s ethos seemed incredibly pertinent to the show. The piece features an Armenian woodwind instrument called a Duduk, which has an incredibly emotive and ancient sound - vocal and human yet otherworldly. This instrument is also used in some of the original

composed music, for example the introduction to the Sunrise Song towards the end of the show, connecting the recorded and sourced music to build a cohesive palate of sounds across the performance.

Sound and music are incredibly important to any Gecko show. The movements made by our performers have a strong sense of musicality and connection to the soundtrack. We build the sound world to any show during the creation process, hand in hand with all the other design elements as each are completely integral to the world of Gecko, and the stories we tell. We hope you enjoy being immersed into our world.

You can get in touch with us at any time on the following:

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Images: Rocio Chacon

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