

Shira and Amal

Story Treatment



Logline:

Shira, an Israeli girl, and Amal, a Palestinian girl, use music to bring peace to Jerusalem and to themselves.

Concept:

Dual-protagonist, epic, animated, musical, feature film developed by a representational, ideologically balanced production team and advisory board to navigate the social, political, and religious factors of the conflict without sacrificing story and commercial-viability.

Shira and Amal

Opening (Credits):

As the sun rises, a bird soars across the holy land. It swoops in and out, revealing the grandeur of the land, the diversity of its peoples, and the hustle and bustle of daily life, prayer, order, and chaos.

Act I: Childhood

Scene I: Family

Ra's as-Sanah has arrived. The extended family of AMAL (AGE 9) gathers at her grandparents' home just outside Ramallah to welcome in the new year. Amal overhears her father, SAMI (Age 43), and her uncle, MARWAN (Age 45), arguing behind closed doors. They speak of protest and resistance on the approaching *Yawm an-Naksa* ("day of the setback"). Sami, a psychologist, advocates to organize a non-violent protest. Marwan, a leader of *Hamas* in the West Bank, insists that the show of force is necessary to advance the Palestinian and Islamic cause.

In parallel, it is *Rosh HaShana*. The extended family of SHIRA (Age 10), gathers at her grandparents' home in Jerusalem to celebrate the new year. Shira's mother, NAOMI (Age 43), entertains her family and guests, playing holiday songs on the piano for the children.

Around the table, the grandparents of the two families take turns sharing the stories of their family history for their grandchildren. When someone brings up recent politics, the two families simultaneously erupt into a symphonic cacophony of perspectives, SINGING 🎵 "The Conflict Song".

Scene II: Daniel

DANIEL (Age 19) is in officer training in the Israeli Defense Force. He exhibits leadership, charisma, and integrity. Months later, it is now the awards ceremony as Daniel is promoted to officer, appointed to protect the city of Jerusalem. His family smiles up at him with pride. As they walk back to the car, Shira playfully sits atop his shoulders and puts on his beret.

Scene III: Walid

Meanwhile in Ramallah, WALĪD (Age 17) passionately plays the trumpet as part of a 3-piece garage band and rap group. They express anger and frustration with an oppressive system they feel trapped in. They RAP 🎵"Miqlae Alshaer" ("Poetry Slingshot"). A young girl, AMAL (Age 9) sits in the corner, captivated by her cousin's performance. Walīd beckons her over and teaches her how to play his trumpet. She gleefully blows into the mouthpiece as he pushes her fingers down on the valves to play the melody of the song they were practicing while the band accompanies them.


Scene IV: The Protest

Months later it is *Yom Yerushalayim*, hundreds of Israelis parade through the streets of Jerusalem to celebrate the reunification of the city following the 1967 War, CHANTING patriotic hymns and SINGING traditional songs. In parallel, thousands of Palestinians gather to pray, protest occupation for *Yawm an-Naksa*, and prevent Jews from worshipping at the Temple Mount. Marwan orders his armed men to position themselves in the area "just in case". He brings Walīd along with him. The Palestinian protesters CHANT their own patriotic hymns and SING traditional songs. As the marchers approach the Muslim quarter, the chants and songs of the two groups escalate into one of hatred. Sami tries desperately to encourage the protesters to remain peaceful, but to no avail.


Scene V: Chaos

The two groups collide. Stones are slung. Rubber bullets fired. Flaming tires rolled. Tear gas cannisters launched. In the chaos, Walīd sees an Israeli security officer club an older Palestinian man. He sees other youths slinging stones through the haze of tear gas. His blood boils. He picks up a stone and hurls it at Daniel, who is on security duty, nailing him in the clavicle. Walīd flees. A chase ensues. Marwan catches sight of Walīd and the IDF officer and commands his men to follow them. Daniel corners Walīd and moves in to arrest him. Walīd resists arrest to escape. He lunges forward as if to grab Daniel's handgun. A shot is fired. Walīd slumps to the ground. Marwan and his men finally catch up to them. He orders his men to fire. Daniel lies dead next to Walīd. Marwan's men parade Walīd's body through the crowd in honor of his martyrdom. Amal looks on in horror at Walīd's lifeless body.

Scene VI: Tragedy

That evening, ZE'EV (Age 46), Shira's uncle and high-ranking Mossad official, visits Shira's family informing them of Daniel's death. He vows that justice will be served. In parallel, Shira and Amal's families attend the funerals of Daniel and Walid. Hundreds are in attendance. Shira and Amal each learn a different story about how Daniel and Walid were killed. Ze'ev and Marwan lead the chorus SINGING  "Deen-'Astashhad" ("Justice-Martyrdom").



Scene VII: Trauma

Shira, Amal, and their families are traumatized. Shira's mother, NAOMI (Age 43) stops playing the piano; her faith in G-D is shattered. Shira becomes xenophobic toward Palestinians. Amal struggles with anger management and develops a hatred of Israelis. In parallel, they SING  "Anger-Fear".

Scene VIII: The World of Music

Shira and Amal discover that music helps them escape the trauma they experienced. Shira learns to play the viola and develops a love of classical music. Amal learns to play the trumpet and develops a love of improvisational jazz.


Scene IX: Khalil and Mizmar

Shira and Amal also invent imaginary friends who help raise their spirits and guide them, offering them respite from reality. For Shira, an eccentric, flightless dove named KHALIL. For Amal, a wise-cracking, French-Lebanese pigeon named MIZMAR. Amal and Mizmar SING  "Express Yourself". Shira and Khalil SING  "Practice, Practice, Practice".

Scene X: Divorce

Shira's parents divorce. Shira's father, AVISHAI (Age 45) accepts a position as a Professor of Middle Eastern History at "Ivory University", a small liberal arts school in the United States. Shira moves with her mother to Tel Aviv where they adapt to secular life.

Scene XI: Growing Up

Nine years go by as Shira and Amal grow up. They SING  "Goodbye" to their childhood as Khalil and Mizmar fade from their consciousness. During this time, it is revealed that Marwan is assassinated under the orders of Ze'ev.

Act II: The Tasks of Adolescence

Scene I: Service

SHIRA (Age 18) is enlisted in the IDF where she joins the Orchestral Unit, *Tizmoret Tzahal*. AMAL (Age 18) pursues a year of community service, teaching music to underprivileged kids in the Palestinian Jerusalem neighborhood of Silwan.

Scene II: Natan

During this time, a young man, NATAN (Age 20), who plays the cello behind Shira in the IDF orchestra, locks eyes with Shira and smiles at her. She blushes and quickly looks away.

Scene III: Acceptance Letter

Avishai encourages Shira to apply to attend Ivory University. She squeals with delight when she receives an acceptance letter.

Scene IV: Unrequited Love

Natan asks Shira to go to the opera together. They have a magical evening. Later, Natan PERFORMS ♪"A Love Song" he wrote for her. They SING as a duet. But Shira falters. She fears romantic attachment for risk of loss and the lack of control that comes with love. She feels ready to start a new chapter of her life.

Scene V: Scouted

EDWARD BARENBOIM (Age 60), director of the Ivory University Orchestra, hears Amal play while on a regional tour and helps recruit her to Ivory University to perform in the orchestra.

Scene VI: Ivory University

Months later, Shira and Amal arrive at Ivory University for the first time. They say goodbye to their parents after moving in and meet their roommates. Shira and Amal attend orientation. The students and professors share the magic of learning that Ivory has to offer and SING ♪"Good 'Ol Ivory".

Scene VII: Worlds Collide

It's the first day of classes. Shira wakes up late for her class on war and peace" taught by PROFESSOR BUSINGYE (Age 57), a Rwandan former conflict mediator. Shira races through the halls, searching for her class. She turns a corner and collides into Amal. Books and papers fly everywhere. They exchange frustrated looks and walk sheepishly into class, interrupting Professor Busingye's lecture.

Scene VIII: Amir

After class, AMIR, a student in Professor Busingye's class, approaches Amal. He tells her he's taking the class because his mother is a Saudi-US diplomat. He boasts of being on the Ivory soccer team and invites her to a party later offering to pick her up in his Mercedes. She snaps at him, letting him know she's not interested, and storms off.

Scene IX: A Bitter Argument

Later in the semester, Professor Busingye assigns Shira and Amal as partners to present an analysis of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict. They meet in the library to begin working on the assignment. They have a resentful argument about the conflict.

Scene X: A Reluctant Partnership

Shira and Amal approach Professor Busingye at the end of the next class and inform him that they cannot possibly work together. Professor Busingye suggests that they compose a song that musically reflects both narratives of the conflict and perform it for the class instead.

Scene XI: "A Song of Hope"

Over the hours spent composing this duet, Shira and Amal bond over their experiences growing up in Jerusalem, their shared sense of pain from losing their loved ones, their shared love of music, and their imaginary friends. They pour these feelings into their duet and PERFORM ♪"A Song of Hope" for the class.

Scene XII: An Unlikely Friendship

After the performance, Shira and Amal become dear friends. Amal begins teaching Shira Arabic and Shira helps improve Amal's Hebrew. They SING ♪"Banat 'Em-Banot Dodim" ("Cousins"), highlighting the similarities as well as differences between the two languages and cultures.

Scene XIII: The Competition

Weeks later, Professor Busingye informs the class of an upcoming student grant competition to develop a conflict mediation project addressing any conflict in the world. Shira and Amal excitedly enter the competition, naively imagining that they will somehow perform "A Song of Hope" for all of Jerusalem to hear. They want to help ensure that no little girl will ever have to lose her loved-ones to this bitter conflict ever again.

Scene XIV: The Mentor

When Shira and Amal's project isn't selected, Professor Busingye encourages them not to give up. Under his guidance, their project evolves into an inter-cultural benefit concert, featuring Jewish and Arab performers from around the world, with the proceeds benefitting peacebuilding organizations.

Scene XV: Entrepreneurship

Weeks pass as Shira and Amal work tirelessly to develop their project. They secure partners, performers, and a venue in Jerusalem but struggle to secure donations. They convince Edward Barenboim to compose an orchestral accompaniment to their duet and bring his orchestra to Jerusalem for the grand finale.

Scene XVI: An Unfortunate Discovery

Winter break has arrived. Amal flies home to visit her family. There Amal stumbles upon a chest of Walid's old belongings. Rumaging through old photographs, she finds a newspaper clipping about Walid's death. She notices the name of his killer, "Daniel Peres", the same family name as Shira.

Scene XVII: Suspicion

Meanwhile, Shira stays with her father near campus. Shira's grandparents come to visit from Israel. They eagerly ask Shira about her experiences at Ivory University. Shira recounts her favorite classes, what it's like to be in the orchestra, as well as her friendship with Amal and their reconciliation project. At the mention of Amal's last name, "Shiqaqi", Shira's grandfather stirs. He exclaims that Amal belongs to the same family of the man who was responsible for Daniel's death and that she mustn't see her anymore.

Scene XVIII: The Breakup

When Shira and Amal return to school, Shira brings up her grandfather's accusation. Amal, suspicious from her discovery in the newspaper clipping, in turn, accuses Shira and her family of being responsible for Walid's death. Shira cannot bear the thought of her brother killing Amal's cousin, muddying the image of her brother she loved and admired so much. They refuse to speak to each other. The benefit concert is cancelled.

Scene XIX: Anger-Management

Weeks pass. During this time, Shira and Amal try to take their minds off the fallout by pouring themselves into their studies. But it is difficult for them to focus. They had found such purpose and meaning in their project, now suddenly lost. Amir approaches Amal again, he says that he was moved by her and Shira's performance and mission. He offers to connect her and Shira to Saudi sponsors through his family. She sharply lets him know that he cannot buy her love and she doesn't think the concert is going to happen anyway. He insists that he just wants to help. She doesn't believe him but looks him in the eyes and tells him that if he continues to act with such nobility, she promises he will find a beautiful and loving wife one day and she's truly sorry, but it won't be her.

Scene XX: Professor Busingye's Story

The original date of the concert looms weeks away. Professor Busingye checks in on Shira and Amal's progress and learns of their fallout. He tricks them into coming to his office at the same time. He opens up to them about losing his son in the Rwandan Genocide and urges them to reconcile the past.

Scene XXI: It is Written

Shira and Amal sit down to eat together at a local Middle Eastern Cuisine restaurant. They rekindle their friendship to finally conquer the trauma that has plagued them all their lives in the pursuit of the greater good. They discuss fate and with renewed faith SING ♪ "Maktoob-Katoov" ("It is Written"), expressing their revelation that the "coincidences" that brought them together and threaten to tear them apart were "written" in fate but that they still have the freedom to choose how to play the hands they've been dealt. Shira and Amal brainstorm a way to make the benefit concert profitable to gain investors.

Act III: Adulthood

Scene I: Return

As the spring semester comes to a close Shira and Amal return home and prepare for the benefit concert together. Amal gets held up by airport security but makes it through.

Scene II: A Second Chance

After arriving in Tel Aviv, Shira goes to a music store to purchase sound equipment for the concert. There she bumps into Natan, who is shopping for equipment for his band. She tells him about the concert she's helping to produce, and he offers his band to perform in support.

Scene III: The Benefit Concert

The day of the concert has finally arrived. Musicians from all walks of life gather to PERFORM 🎵 "A Multi-Cultural Medley" together in the name of peace. Shira invited her parents to be there for her big day. They begin to reconnect.

Scene IV: Sabotage

Everything is going splendidly when suddenly, Shira and Amal receive a garbled phone call from an anonymous saboteur reporting that a bomb has been planted somewhere in the audience. Instead of performing the grand finale, Shira and Amal must go on stage to inform the audience of this threat. Panic breaks loose. The concert is ruined. The bomb turns out to be an empty threat.

Scene V: Despair

Hours later, Shira and Amal glumly clean up after the concert. They despair that all of their hard work was for nothing and there will never be peace.

Scene VII: A Bold New Plan

When a nearby minaret suddenly emits the Islamic call to prayer, Amal stops and looks up. In an instant she bolts towards the Old City of Jerusalem. Shira desperately follows on her tail. They finally reach a point overlooking the Temple Mount. Amal turns to Shira, panting, and announces a bold new plan.

Scene VIII: The *Mu'azzin*

Amal convinces her grandfather, a retired *mu'azzin*, to let them go up to the top of the Bab al-Silsila minaret overlooking all of Jerusalem. Shira pretends to be Amal's sister and gets into the Temple Mount, wearing a *hijab*.

Scene IX: The Grand Finale

There, they PERFORM ♪"A Song of Hope". Encircling the crowds of Muslim and Jewish worshippers, Edward Barenboim's orchestra accompanies Shira and Amal. Their song echoes across Jerusalem. As Shira and Amal play, they remember Walid and Daniel with bitter-sweetness. Khalil and Mizmar triumphantly return to their consciousness for the final movement of the song. Shira and Amal play the last few notes. Silence hangs in the air.

Scene X: Unity

Suddenly, inspired by the music, the Muslim worshippers begin to sing a *nasheed* together. On the other side of Western Wall, the Jewish worshippers begin to sing a *nigun together*. Shira and Amal hear the two melodies and begin to harmonize them from atop the minaret. The orchestra around them accompanies Shira and Amal. Church bells ring in the distance. The music rings out across Jerusalem - ♪"Unity".

Scene XI: Jail

Without warning, Shira and Amal are seized from behind. They are arrested by the Waqf authorities for violating the religious space and thrown in jail. Shira and Amal's families watch the events unfold on their local news channels and race to the Waqf office to try to bail their daughters out of jail. Amal's mother, NOORA (Age 41), a human rights lawyer, berates the Waqf officials, demanding that they let Shira and Amal go. While waiting for their daughters' release, Shira and Amal's parents meet and have a heart to heart.

Scene XII: Closure

The next evening, Shira and Amal's families gather together to break bread. Naomi plays the piano again. Avishai stands over her, his hands gently on her shoulders. Amal's mother and grandfather sings along. Shira and Amal accompany them. Natan plays his cello. The grandmothers quibble over which culture cooks the best food. The grandfathers debate politics. The

fathers discuss philosophy. The sun sets as Jerusalem rests in peaceful sabbath.

Characters

Shira – An Israeli girl from Jerusalem. Shira (Age 10) is curious and sweet. She learns to play the viola. After the death of her older brother, Shira closes herself off and escapes into the world of classical music. Shira (Age 20) is accepted to “Ivory University” and performs in the university’s orchestra. She plans to study literature and become a writer and educator.

Amal – A Palestinian girl from *Kfar 'Aqab* inside the municipality of Jerusalem. Amal (Age 9) is rambunctious and bright. She learns to play the trumpet. After the death of her beloved cousin Walid she struggles with anger-management and escapes into the world of improvisational jazz. She is recruited to “Ivory University” to perform in the university’s orchestra. She plans to become neuroscientist.

Walid – Amal’s cousin. Walid (Age 17) is an impulsive but good-natured young man. He plays the trumpet and raps in a garage-band-rap-group in Ramallah. He is killed after throwing stones at a protest gone awry.

Daniel – Shira’s older brother. Daniel (Age 19) is a soldier in the Israeli Defense Forces, a loving brother and son. He is killed by *Hamas* militants at a protest gone awry.

Kha.lil – Shira’s eccentric imaginary friend. Khalil is a dove but he can’t fly. He helps Shira learn classical music and cope with the trauma she experienced.

Mizmar – Amal’s imaginary friend; a wise-cracking, French Lebanese pigeon. He helps Amal learn jazz and cope with the trauma she experienced.

Professor Busingye – Shira and Amal’s professor in their class “War and Peace”. Professor Busingye (Age 57) served as a conflict mediator during the Rwandan Genocide and lost his son.

Edward Barenboim – Director of the Ivory University Student Orchestra who recruits Amal to Ivory.

Avishai – Shira's father (Age 45). A professor of Middle Eastern history. Born in Jerusalem. After his divorce, he takes a position as a Professor at Ivory University.

Naomi – Shira's mother (Age 43). Naomi was born in Tehran but fled with her family to Israel in wake of the 1979 Islamic Revolution when she was still a girl. She is a music teacher but after the death of Daniel she cannot bring herself to play.

Sami – Amal's father (Age 43). Sami grew up in the Qalandiya Refugee Camp. He became a psychologist with the intent to heal the trauma of the Palestinian people.

Noora – Amal's mother (Age 41). A human rights lawyer and daughter of a *mu'azzin* in Jerusalem.

Marwan – Amal's uncle, Sami's brother, Walid's father (Age 45). Marwan is a high-ranking official of *Hamas* in the West Bank. He is responsible for Daniel's death.

Ze'ev – Shira's Uncle (Age 46). Ze'ev is a high-ranking *Mossad* official. After the death of his nephew, Daniel, Ze'ev leads the assassination of Marwan.

Mendel – Shira's paternal grandfather (Age 76). A Holocaust survivor from Hungary. He served in the Knesset in the Likud.

Sarah – Shira's paternal grandmother (Age 75). A *sabra*. Her grandparents emigrated from Iraq.

Nehemiah – Shira's maternal grandfather (Age 70). Nehemiah was a *Haz̤zān* in Tehran before he and his wife fled Iran with their daughter in wake of the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

Esther – Shira's maternal grandmother (Age 66). Esther is traditional Jewish wife and mother. A classic Jewish grandmother with a twinkle in her eye.

Yūsif – Amal's maternal grandfather (Age 68). Yūsif is a *mu'azzin* of Al-Aqsa and comes from a long line of *mu'azzinin* in Jerusalem.

Fatimah – Amal's maternal grandmother (Age 64). Grew up in Amman and moved to Jerusalem for an arranged marriage. A traditional Muslim wife and mother.

Mahmoud – Amal's paternal grandfather (Age 69). Mahmoud is from Ramla but was forced from his home by the *Palmach* during *al-Nakba* of 1948. A former leader in the *PLO*.

Hiba – Amal's paternal grandmother (Age 67). Hiba was born to a wealthy family in Beit Hanina who fled their home in wake of the 1948 Arab-Israeli War. She grew up in the Qalandiya Refugee Camp. A classic, loving Palestinian *sitty*.

Natan – A cellist in Shira's IDF Orchestra Unit. He reminds Shira of her brother. He is funny and kind and has ADHD. Growing up, the only thing he could bring himself to focus on was music.

Amir – A classmate at Ivory. Amir comes from the Arabian Peninsula. The son of a diplomat to the US. Arrogant, materialistic.

Musical Numbers

🎵 *"Miqlae Alshaer"* ("Poetry Slingshot") – A rap song accompanied by a 3-piece band including a trumpet, drums, and a piano and 2 rappers expressing their anger and frustration at an oppressive system they feel trapped in. They "want to sling words not stones". They question the stark contrast between terrorist and freedom fighter; victim and oppressor.

🎵 *"The Conflict Song"* – A symphonic cacophony of perspectives. "The Conflict Song" uses satire and music to show the diversity of perspectives, mitigate the cognitive dissonance associated with hearing opposing ideological narratives and make it more engaging and palatable, especially for children.

🎵 *"Deen- 'Astashhad"* ("Justice-Martyrdom") – Expresses the cyclical nature of violence and the two ways that Israelis and Palestinians see justice and revenge, resistance and security.

🎵 *"Anger, Fear"* – Expresses Shira and Amal's reaction to the traumatic loss of Walid and Daniel. Shira reacts with fear and closes herself off from the world. Amal reacts with frustration and lashes out against the world.

🎵 *"Express Yourself"* – In this song, Mizmar helps Amal find her creative expression through improvisational jazz music.

🎵 "Practice, Practice, Practice" – In this song, Khalil helps teach Shira the value of discipline and encourages her to practice.

🎵 "Goodbye" – Expresses Shira and Amal saying goodbye to childhood as Khalil and Mizmar fade from consciousness.

🎵 "Good 'Ol Ivory" – The students and professors of Ivory University express the magic of learning that Ivory has to offer during orientation. A fusion of the school's "fight song" and "alma mater" but also a satire of elite higher education.

🎵 "A Song of Hope" – Expresses both narratives of the Israeli-Arab Conflict as seen through Shira and Amal's eyes ending on a note of hope for the future.

🎵 "Banat 'Em-Banot Dodim" ("Cousins") – Highlights the similarities as well as differences between the languages, cultures, and music of the two Semitic cousins.

🎵 "Maktoob-Katoov" ("It is written") – Expresses the idea that the "coincidences" that brought Shira and Amal together and threatens to tear them apart were written in destiny but that they still have the freedom to choose how to move forward.

🎵 "A Multi-Cultural Medley" – A collection of songs from famous talented musicians from all walks of life performed continuously in a music video montage.

🎵 "A Song of Hope" (Full Orchestra Reprise) – Shira and Amal's "A Song of Hope" performed with a full orchestral accompaniment with Shira and Amal's duet as the grand finale.

🎵 "Unity" – Expressing the underlying oneness of the secular and Abrahamic faiths as well as humanity itself as Shira and Amal help merge the melodies of the Islamic *nasheed* and Jewish *nigun*.