Narrative:

A Blessing on the Moon is a new music-theater work composed by Andy Teirstein, and based on the novel by Teirstein’s collaborator, Joseph Skibell (the novel was published by Algonquin Books, 1997). Joseph Skibell often describes A Blessing on the Moon as “a novel masquerading as a folk tale.” Andy Teirstein describes his musical adaptation as “an opera masquerading as a folk spiel.” The journey of Chaim Skibelski, who has just been shot dead, and his Rabbi, who is now a crow, as they wander through Poland searching for an afterlife, lends itself easily to the genre of music-theater. Words, music and movement can be expressive of the edges of experience explored in the magical realism of this epic narrative, which contains wry humor, poetry, and a sharp sense of each character's perspective, even extending to the Polish family that has moved into the protagonist’s home, and the German soldier who has shot him.
Mr. Skibell is a recipient of the prestigious Sami Rohrer prize for Jewish Literature, an NEA Award, a James A. Michener Fellowship and the Rosenthal Foundation Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters. In collaboration with composer Andy Teirstein, he has created the libretto for this piece.

Teirstein created several music-theater projects over the years, each of which received foundation support and awards (National Endowment for the Arts, Richard Rodgers Award-American Academy of Arts and Letters). These projects were produced in New York City to critical acclaim. Bernard Holland of the New York Times wrote, “‘Winter Man’ employs the cool hand of technique. Audience members leave the theater moved and troubled precisely because they have been made to see clearly.” Two of Teirstein’s music theater works have received the NEA Opera/Musical Theater award, and one has received the Richard Rodgers Award.

The Novel

“You’ve never read a book like this before—part Holocaust memoir, part ghost story, part Hebrew folklore, part surrealistic road epic.”

— The Bloomsbury Review

“…recalls the dark, hallucinatory world of Jerzy Kosinski’s ‘the Painted Bird’ while at the same time surpassing it.”

— The Washington Post

The Music

The performing ensemble will include 7 singing actors. In keeping with the location and cultural milieu of the book, musical interludes for a wordless chorus will be drawn from Polish folk roots.

Project History

Twelve years ago, when I read the novel, A Blessing on the Moon. I found myself entering a broken world in which animals can speak, the fallen moon is pulled from a pit of bones, and a lost village rises from beneath the earth to follow a crow through the forest. It seemed to me that the pages were crying out to be musicalized. Masterfully echoing with the effects of genocide on both the pursuers and the pursued, the story is entirely pertinent to today’s world. After receiving permission from the author, Joseph Skibell, to proceed, I met with several potential librettists. In 1977, Mr. Skibell invited me to Emory, where he is a professor of creative writing, to collaborate on a choreographic version of the story. This resulted in a workshop of the first 20 minutes of the piece, fostered by Theater Emory in their “Brave New Works” festival. The workshop opened the door to a friendship between myself and the author, who finally became the librettist.

A Blessing on the Moon, the opera Part I, premiered in a concert version on February 6, 2012, before a sold-out crowd at Le Poisson Rouge, an arts cabaret on Bleecker Street on the site of the historic Village Gate. The event had been publicized in the New Yorker magazine with a painting the magazine commissioned from artist Carson Ellis. The audience ringed the block waiting to get in. Five singers performed the score with the Warsaw Village Band as the orchestra. A week later, the opera, fully staged, opened the Lisa Nemetz International Showcase of Jewish Performing Arts (the Chutzpah! Festival) in Vancouver, where it was warmly received. The festival has invited the project back, to be premiered in its entirety in 2014.
**Principals of the A Blessing on the Moon Team**

ANDY TEIRSTEIN (Composer, Co-librettist) writes music inspired by the rich and diverse folk roots of modern culture. His compositions have been described by The New York Times and The Village Voice as "magical," "ingenious," and "superbly crafted." A student of Leonard Bernstein and Henry Brant, Teirstein composes for the concert hall, film, theater, and dance. His newest CD, *Open Crossings*, draws on Balkan, Appalachian, and classical influences. He has composed film scores for BBC and PBS. Teirstein has created several music-theater projects over the years, each of which received foundation support and awards (National Endowment for the Arts, Richard Rodgers Award-American Academy of Arts and Letters). These projects were produced in New York City to critical acclaim. Bernard Holland of the New York Times wrote, "'Winter Man' employs the cool hand of technique. Audience members leave the theater moved and troubled precisely because they have been made to see clearly." Two of Teirstein’s music theater works have received the NEA Opera/Musical Theater award, and one has received the Richard Rodgers Award.

JOSEPH SKIBELL (Novelist, Co-librettist) is the author of two other prize-winning novels, *The English Disease* (2003) and *A Curable Romantic* (2010). He is a graduate of the Michener Center for Writers at the University of Texas. In addition to the Rosenthal Family Foundation Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, he has received a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship, two awards from the Texas Institute of Letters, and the Sami Rohr Award in Jewish Literature. He is a professor of English at Emory University and the director of the Richard Ellmann Lectures in Modern Literature.

BOB McGrath (Director) is co-founder and Artistic Director of Ridge Theater. He has directed theater and opera at venues including the Brooklyn Academy of Music, Lincoln Center, The American Repertory Theater, Carnegie Hall's Zankel Hall, Vineyard Theater, La MaMa E.T.C., and Arts at St. Ann's. He has collaborated with composers and writers including John Adams, Gavin Bryars, Ben Katchor, David Lang, Michael Gordon, Neil Labute, Warren Leight, Mark Mulcahy, Ben Neill, D.B.R. Daniel Bernard Roumain, Mikel Rouse, Susan Sontag, DJ Spooky, Mac Wellman, and Julia Wolfe. Teaching: Virginia Tech (current), Sarah Lawrence College, and NYU. Mr. McGrath is the recipient of three OBIE awards.

WILL ERAT (the role of CHAIM) Will appeared in "Catch Me If You Can" on Broadway. He earned critical acclaim for the World Premiere/Tour of Philip Glass and Leonard Cohen's collaboration, "Book Of Longing" as a featured soloist. NYC credits include - "Dirty Rotten Scoundrels", "I Love You, You're Perfect...", "Prince and the Pauper", "Don't Quit Your Night Job", and the hit 2000 production and recording of "Godspell". Will has performed as a soloist at such venues as the Sydney Opera House, La Scala, The Barbican, Carnegie Hall, and Avery Fisher Hall, among others.
For more information:

**Video Overview** -

**Websites** -
www.andyteirstein.com
www.josephskibell.com
www.ablessingonthemoon.com
www.warsawvillageband.net
www.ridgedtheater.org
www.chutzpahfestival.com
www.bethmorrisonprojects.org

**Imagery**

Below: The Image by Carson Ellers, created for *The New Yorker* magazine, which places the members of the *Warsaw Village Band* into the landscape of the opera.

**Imagery from the Partial Production in February, 2012, below:**

Will Erat and the 2012 Cast

Zachary James, as Herr Direktor

Zachary James and Jonathan Estabrooks

Poster from the Le Poisoon Rouge Concert