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EQUIPO EDITORIAL  
INFORMACIÓN PARA LOS AUTORES  
CÓMO CITAR TRANS  
INDEXACIÓN  
CONTACTO

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[< Volver](#)

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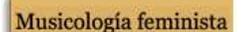
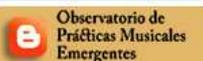
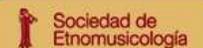
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## Judeo-Spanish song: a Mediterranean-wide interactive tradition

Judith R. Cohen

### Abstract

Judeo-Spanish Sephardic ("Ladino") songs have been sung, remembered, composed, and adapted around the Mediterranean, from the late-fifteenth-century expulsions from Iberian lands to festivals of new Ladino songs. This reflective survey explores mythologies around this multi-site, interactive tradition, of which diaspora and re-invention have been defining elements since its inception. Following a brief background, it evokes a lost ethnographic utopia, then moves on to the fledgling recording industry and early forays into systematic fieldwork. It surveys developments in the mid-to-late twentieth and the early twenty-first centuries, when solid scholarship and documentary recordings appeared alongside exoticization and myths. As the repertoire moved into the World Music scene, its older genres and performance styles virtually disappeared, giving way to a re-invented canon and performance practice.

**Keywords:** Sephardic Ladino Judeo-Spanish.

According to a contemporary chronicle, the rabbis "facian cantar á las mujeres e mancebos" - exhorted the Jewish women and young people to sing - as they reluctantly set sail from Castile on the actual day of the exile in 1492 (Bernaldez 1493: 257). Just what they sang, however, how they sang it, and how long they continued to sing it in their Mediterranean diaspora, we do not know. In fact, there is no reason to assume that there was ever one unified Sephardic musical tradition before the expulsions.<sup>[i]</sup> The lyrics of many romances and some life cycle and other songs can be traced back to the pre-Expulsion period, and many of the stories behind the *romances* go back much earlier. However, no Judeo-Spanish song *melodies* can be traced back to the Middle Ages, although there are some structural and other correspondences with late medieval and early renaissance *cancioneros* (Katz 1973, Etzion and Weich-Shahak 1988).

Nevertheless, a pervasive popular myth of Judeo-Spanish song is that it somehow sprang into existence in "medieval Spain" – itself, of course, a construct. This "medieval" period is conveniently assumed to extend until the 1492 Expulsion: terms such as "renaissance" or "early modern" are avoided in popular discourse about Judeo-Spanish songs, perhaps because they lack the exotic resonance of "medieval". No musical notation of Sephardic songs has ever been found, at least at the time of writing, from that period or, indeed, for centuries after that, and Judeo-Spanish itself, often called "Ladino", developed in the post-expulsion Sephardic diaspora.<sup>[ii]</sup> Nevertheless, it quickly became common to refer to entire songs, rather than only their lyrics, as "medieval", and from there to romantic presentations of almost all Judeo-Spanish songs, not only those whose origins were indeed pre-exilic, as having "left Spain with the exiles". Even early music specialists whose training must tell them that certain melodies cannot be "medieval" often include Judeo-Spanish songs, among them some from centuries after the Expulsion, in early music concert programmes and recordings.<sup>[iii]</sup>

There were Muslim and Jewish, as well as Christian, musicians in the court of Alfonso X, but, again, at the time of writing, we know little about about their musical interactions. The medieval Iberian Jewish poets used Arabic poetic metres, and may well have adapted Arabic melodies, as indeed Sephardim have adapted local melodies wherever they live.<sup>[iv]</sup> From nuggets of information available from various sources, one might venture to suggest that music of the Muslim Iberian world influenced that of the Christians and Jews more than the other way around. A Provençal rabbi inveighed against the popularity of local secular, i.e. Christian, songs among Jewish girls.

[v] Tantalizing references to incipits of Judeo-Spanish songs, often *romances*, used for religious singing in Hebrew appear in documents of various stages of the diaspora;<sup>[vi]</sup> again, however, it is difficult to know which tunes these songs were actually using at the time, and whether those tunes are still extant, or were among those transcribed in the early twentieth century. For the moment, then, one cannot speak of specific melodies for Judeo-Spanish songs until the first transcriptions appear, in the early twentieth century.

Jews have lived in Morocco for about two millennia: the presence of refugees from persecution in Spain began after the 1391 riots in Seville, and intensified with the expulsions from Spain and Portugal in the late fifteenth century. They mostly settled in the north of the country, especially in Tangier, Tetuan, Arzila, Larache and Alcazarquivir (Ksar-al-Kibir.) As of July, 2010, when I last visited, there were only about eighty Jews remaining in Tangier, and fifteen in Tetuan – a sad remnant of the thriving communities which existed for centuries. A few thousand live in Casablanca and Rabat, but of these, most speak French and Arabic rather than Spanish or *khaketia*. In the eastern Mediterranean, in the former Ottoman lands, approximately twenty thousand, according to community estimates, still live in Turkey: mostly in Istanbul, with a smaller community in Izmir and a few scattered families elsewhere. A few thousand live in Greece – mostly in Athens, and in Thessalonika, where Jews were once a significant proportion of the city's entire population but were decimated in the Holocaust. Only a handful remain on the island of Rhodes. About seven hundred live in Bosnia-Herzegovina, formerly an emblematic site of peaceful co-existence among Jews, Christians and Muslims. A few hundred live in Bulgaria, and Jews of former Yugoslavia, though many no longer live there, have formed the association Beyahad ("together") which organizes cultural activities. Most other Judeo-Spanish speakers today live in Israel, as well as in Spain, France and the Americas.

There are now few native Judeo-Spanish speakers left, most of them elderly, and, although courses are offered and students sign up to learn a standardized version of the language, children are not brought up with the language as their mother tongue, and it seems unlikely that it will continue to exist in a natural, day-to-day context. The decline of the language is not, however, new: many Turkish Sephardic Jews born between about 1920 and 1940 have told me they mostly spoke French at home in their youth, because of the influence of French culture and also the schools of the Alliance Israélite Universelle: by the early twentieth century many were speaking Judeo-Spanish only with their grandmothers. In Morocco, use of *khaketia* was compromised by proximity to Spain, especially during the years of the Spanish Protectorate in the north of the country (1912-1956); however, women especially continued to use *khaketia*.

### Traditional song genres and styles

Traditionally, Ladino songs have been categorized by both form and function, usually in the following main groups: romances, life cycle songs, calendar cycle songs and general (lyrical, topical, recreational) songs.[vii]

The pioneer ethnomusicologist of Judeo-Spanish song, Israel J. Katz, distinguishes between two main musical styles: the western Mediterranean, i.e. northern Morocco, and the eastern Mediterranean, i.e. Turkey and the Balkans, with Greece as a possible subset or even separate category (Katz 1982). While Katz's work remains an indispensable reference, here I will refer to Moroccan and former Ottoman area traditions; the latter includes Greece. One major musical difference between the two main areas is the Ottoman use of the *maqam* system for the older songs; Moroccan Judeo-Spanish songs only occasionally use microtonal intervals. Katz suggests that vocal ornamentation in the Ottoman area is more complex than in Morocco, but this really applies only to the older songs, especially the romancero, and to singing styles which have largely disappeared: the Ottoman area songs most people are familiar with are often relatively simple. In any case, many Moroccan Sephardic singers also take justifiable pride in their *floreo*, or vocal ornamentation. In all areas, songs are typically sung monophonically.

Local rhythmic patterns often appear in Judeo-Spanish songs, especially, but not exclusively, in wedding songs. In Morocco the pattern is usually a driving 6/8, while in the former Ottoman lands, while a simple duple metre is often used, the "crooked" (sometimes called *aksak*) rhythmic patterns of the area also appear, especially 7/8 (3-2-2 or 2-2-3) and 9/8 (usually 2-2-2-3).

Typically, Judeo-Spanish songs are sung by women, liturgical singing in Hebrew is the province of men, and para-liturgical songs, sometimes in a mixture of Ladino and Hebrew, are often known by both women and men. Romances and life cycle songs, especially in complete versions, are usually a woman's repertoire, though men know them well enough to use their melodies in contrafacta, for religious texts (see Seroussi 2009). The lyric and topical songs which appeared from the late nineteenth century on are also often known by both women and men, though, as in the case of romances and life cycle songs, women often know more complete versions.

*Romances*, narrative ballads, were most typically sung by women, a capella, as they carried out domestic tasks and child care, either alone or in the company of other women, and children. In these same contexts, they passed the songs along to their daughters, grand-daughters, and nieces.[viii] This rather utopian ethnographic vision has not existed for some time, although there are, of course, some women who still know the old *romances* from family tradition and sing them to their children. In general, the romancero lasted longer as an active tradition among Moroccan women than among women from the former Ottoman lands.[ix] Even a century ago, the boundaries between oral and written transmission were blurred, as young women kept notebooks in which they wrote the words to their favourite songs, often romances.[x] More recently, older Moroccan women I interviewed in Canada wrote letters to family members living in France, Morocco or Israel for lyrics they could not remember, and, some weeks later, would show me the written responses. The Internet offers another take on the blurred edges of orality and literacy, with electronic discussion groups such as *Ladinokomunita* and *Sefaradimuestro* offering a thriving exchange among participants over several continents, all in Judeo-Spanish, often referring to songs or indicating specific Youtube sites. Over the past couple of decades, the term *romance* has also become confused with the eastern Mediterranean Judeo-Spanish *romansa*: the latter, although originally it meant the same as *romance*, is often used to refer to almost any song in Judeo-Spanish, even among Ladino speakers, by association with the word "romantic".[xi]

Of the life cycle songs, the most numerous are wedding songs. There were songs for every stage of a wedding, including formal visits and gift exchanges between members of the bride's and the groom's family, exhibiting the trousseau, the bride's ritual bath, the bride's henna night, and the wedding

ever, that a wedding goes through these stages, although a modernized henna night does occur in some communities; for the most part, the songs have faded away from daily life along with their traditional contexts (see Weich-Shahak 2007). Among the songs traditionally used as birth songs is the well-known “Avram avinu” or “Cuando el Rey Nimrod”, recounting the birth of the patriarch Abraham. In general, birth songs, of which there are not very many, celebrate the arrival of male rather than female offspring. Lament ballads, known in Judeo-Spanish as *endechas* or *oínas*, may refer to either human deaths or to wide tragedies such as the fall of the second temple. They are difficult to record because the few women who still know them are reluctant to sing them outside the relevant sad occasions, and reluctant to admit recording technology on such an occasion (Weich-Shahak 2001, 1982 and, for children’s repertoire, 2001.)

Calendar cycle songs tend to fare somewhat better, as the relevant occasions are a constant in Jewish life. Both women and men know them, and they typically include many words and expressions, sometimes entire phrases, in Hebrew. On the actual day of most holidays, observant Jews do not play musical instruments, but at other times, as is the case for weddings, they play the instruments associated with the local culture. The calendar cycle songs often include words and whole phrases from Hebrew.

Lyric, topical, recreational, etc. songs, often known as “canticas”, are generally relatively recent songs, and also those most familiar to aficionados of Ladino songs, as they are the ones which appear most often on commercially available recordings and concert programmes, and which, ironically, tend to be promoted as medieval remnants. Many Israeli-Turkish Sephardic women I interviewed in the 1980s had first heard many of these songs from their mothers, but then relearned them from commercial recordings by the Israeli singer Yehoram Gaon and others, and sang them to me in these later versions. New songs are also being composed in Judeo-Spanish, although not in the form of romances for the most part.

Early twentieth-century recordings, fieldwork and studies.

The majority of the songs which have entered the popular Ladino repertoire are from the eastern Mediterranean, the former Ottoman lands, rather than Morocco. One of the reasons for this is that the fledgling recording industry of the early twentieth century had a strong presence in Turkey, beginning very early on, in 1900. The first Turkish record company was founded by Russian Jews in 1910; many of their recordings targeted the Turkish Sephardic market (Bresler). The same, however, was not true of the Sephardim from northern Morocco, recordings of whom did not appear until decades later.

These early twentieth century Sephardic recordings are, of course, invaluable. However, they do not represent the repertoire and performance style of what would be the last years of the average woman singing romances and wedding songs, in domestic and community settings. In fact, the recordings contain few romances, for various reasons. Most of the Turkish Judeo-Spanish recordings were made by men, who were often also synagogue cantors. Victoria Rosa Hazan (1896 Turkey – 1995 USA) was the most important woman singer recorded in the early twentieth century; her recordings were made after she had moved as a young woman to New York City.

The technical limitations which led to the famous, or infamous, three-minute song made it possible to sing only abbreviated versions of romances, as most of them take longer to sing. As well, recording the then-new popular songs, often translated or adapted into Ladino from French, Spanish, Latin American, Greek and Turkish originals, assured healthy sales. Some romances were recorded by master singers such as the rabbi and cantor Isaac Algazi (1889 Turkey – 1950 Uruguay), or the highly influential “Haim Effendi” (Haim Behar Menahem, 1853 Turkey -1938 Egypt).<sup>[xii]</sup> However, most of the Judeo-Spanish songs recorded at the time were the newer popular and even novelty songs. Many compositions, often satirical parodies and comments on current events, were meant to be sung to well-known melodies, although the latter were not always indicated.<sup>[xiii]</sup>

Even then, there was a certain disjunction between what was popular in public performance spaces and recordings, and what was sought after by Hispanic scholars who had recently become aware of this Sephardic heritage. The latter were fascinated by the survival of many romances in Sephardic repertoires, and were also looking for archaic linguistic forms. This divide, or perhaps more appropriately, these parallel, occasionally intersecting, paths, would continue for decades, even up until the present. In the musical transcriptions made in the first decades of the twentieth century, at the same time the recordings were appearing, quite a different repertoire emerges. The recordings focus, as we have seen, on popular songs, including adaptations from other repertoires of the time, while the musical transcriptions of Manrique de Lara (Ottoman lands and Morocco) and, later, Arcadio de Larrea Palacin (Morocco), focus on romances and life cycle songs. Abraham Zvi Idelsohn did transcribe the songs he heard, which corresponded more to the popular recordings, but his were only a handful of pieces published in a much larger anthology. Larrea’s transcriptions were published as books in the 1950s, but Manrique’s never were, except for several which the musicologist Israel J. Katz carefully retranscribed in scholarly publications (Katz 1979).

Beginning in the 1930s, the Sephardic composer Alberto Hemsí (1898-1975), born near Izmir in Turkey, published a series of Ladino songs, mostly from his own fieldwork, with piano arrangements, and without the microtones of the Ottoman area *maqam* musical system.<sup>[xiv]</sup> From the late 1950s through the early 1970s, Turkish-born Israeli musician, composer and historian Isaac Levy compiled the volumes of Judeo-Spanish song which would become the standard for many, perhaps most, of the artists who formed the “Sephardic song revival” of the last decades of the twentieth century. Levy also ignored the microtones of the *maqam* system, most of the rhythmic subtleties, performance practice in general, and information about the singers and the contexts of the songs.<sup>[xv]</sup> Larrea’s publications were never as widely known as Levy’s, and Manrique’s mostly remained unpublished, so for the most part, for a long time Levy’s westernized transcriptions became the basis for a reconstruction of Ladino songs. His selection also focused much more on popular songs than on romances and life cycle songs, so many of the melodies were already quite western or westernized. The vast majority of the songs in Levy’s

As we have seen, while scholars focused on what perhaps may be thought of as the “classic” Judeo-Spanish song repertoire – the romancero, life cycle songs and calendar cycle songs, the Ladino song revival of the last third of the twentieth century featured mostly songs which were newer, often in a Western rather than Middle Eastern or North African style. These were typically learned from transcriptions stripped of most local performance practice characteristics and with little or no ethnographic contextual information. Early recordings suggest that singers such as Haim Effendi performed even western melodies with ornaments, vocal timbre and instrumentation clearly reflecting the Turkish musical environment. However, many performers of the revival presented these songs, often adapted from late nineteenth or early twentieth century Western or popular Turkish compositions, as medieval survivals. Since there is no available model of medieval vocal performance practice to imitate, currently fashionable approaches to Western vocal practices were often used, rather than the Turkish vocal styling which Haim Effendi and others incorporated even into western European melodies. These western art or folk music vocal stylizings were often coupled with replicas of medieval and renaissance instruments, often combined with Middle Eastern instruments. A few of the new artists were themselves Sephardic, such as the groups Los Pasharos Sefardis, and Janet and Jak Esim (Turkey), or the Moroccan ensemble Gerineldo (Canada) and Yehoram Gaon and other well-known singers in Israel. Of these, only Gerineldo made the older repertoire – romances, life cycle and calendar cycle songs – the focus of their concerts and recordings. [xvi]

Many others, however, were not Sephardic, especially in Spain; and all too often had little or no knowledge of the tradition and its ethnographic contexts. The repertoire was reconstructed in ways usually inconsistent with traditional performance styles, although on a musical level the performances were often excellent.

During the same decades, documentary recordings, featuring the romances, and life and calendar cycle songs which were the main focus of scholarly concern, began to be commercially available. Susana Weich-Shahak began to publish both her fieldwork recordings and, as well, both scholarly and lay interest books and articles, and Edwin Seroussi, Miguel Sánchez and others began to make some old 78rpm recordings available (see Cohen, “Discography”, and Bresler). Earlier, Israel J. Katz had included a small disc of romances from his early fieldwork in Jerusalem with his first major publication (Katz 1972-5.) However, fewer artists worked closely with these recordings; for the most part continuing to perform the same relatively small corpus of mostly relatively recent love songs typically presented as “medieval”.

Diplomatic ties between Israel and Spain were established in 1986 and, only six years later, 1992 marked the quincentenary of the expulsion of the Jews in 1492. Already, artists such as Victoria de los Angeles, Sofia Noel and Joaquín Díaz had recorded Sephardic songs, and the quincentary spawned a series of cultural activities and the creation of the Red de Juderías (network of old Jewish quarters) and, later on, of Casa Sefarad-Israel. Festivals and conferences featuring Sephardic culture and history began to appear, and, as well, events presented as featuring “the three cultures”, presumably because the phrase “the three religions”, referring to the three monotheistic religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, was somehow seen as less politically correct than “three cultures.” All these activities gave considerable impulse to performance of Judeo-Spanish songs in Spain, and many folk ensembles and individual artists who previously had little or no interest in or knowledge of the tradition began to include Ladino songs in their repertoire, some presenting themselves as specialists. Sephardic singing had re-crossed the Mediterranean, once again becoming part of the Iberian musical tapestry.

Both in Spain and elsewhere, performers typically offered, in fact often continue to offer, descriptors such as “medieval survivals”, “exotic”, “passionate”, or, more specifically, “common origins with flamenco”.) Occasionally, a specific century is invoked, apparently randomly: for example, in a concert I attended in Spain some years ago, a Spanish singer introduced an “eleventh-century Sephardic lullaby”, although there is no surviving Sephardic music from that period and in fact no “Spanish” language as such, much less the Ladino or vernacular Judeo-Spanish of the post-expulsion diaspora. When asked, the singer said that a relative or friend who was an archeologist had said he thought the songs must be from the eleventh century that his opinion ought to be reliable. At a “three cultures” festival in a small town in 2004, the music director of the festival assured me that the song “Avrisme, galanica” was from the “fourteenth century: the authorities have said so”, and the young musicians there included phonetic renditions of “Hava naguila” accompanied by plastic recorders as part of the “medieval Sephardic repertoire.” [xvii] Some time afterwards, I heard a well-known artist tell the audience that in the fifteenth century the Gitanos entered Spain “with a special rhythm of twelve called *burlerías*”, and that this rhythm and its melodies merged with Jewish tradition of the time, creating Judeo-Spanish songs. Leaving aside the unlikelihood of *burlerías* entering Spain with Gitanos in the fifteenth century, no documentation has been found, to my knowledge, which links fifteenth-century Iberian Jews and Gitanos, despite persistent speculation about the “bella judía” of the *petenera* (see Cohen 1999). [xviii]

Some have also made assumed that Crypto-Jewish individuals and communities in neighbouring Portugal either know Ladino songs or have a mysterious affinity for them. It is certainly true that many of those who still identify themselves as “Judeus”, or at least know they are descended from Conversos, are descendants of Jews who fled from Spain to Portugal after the Edict of Expulsion. However, again, most of the best-known Ladino songs are from the diaspora, often fairly late compositions learned from Spanish singers by Sephardic Jews in former Ottoman lands. Naturally, romances and some other songs may be found in both Sephardic repertoires and in many areas of Spain and Portugal: the stories have remained the same or similar, while the melodies have changed over the centuries. This does not mean the songs are “medieval”, as we have seen; rather, that in these cases both the exiled Sephardim and the conversos and Old Christians of Iberia kept singing the same ballads, adapting the words and the melodies as time went on. Again, these are rarely the songs performed by many performers and presented as “medieval survivals” (see Cohen, in press, and Ferré 1987). My own fieldwork over the years suggests that many or perhaps most of those who identify themselves as “Judeus” are more interested in popular songs from Israel than in Judeo-Spanish songs which not part of their musical life until visitors began to visit them in the late twentieth century and leave cassette or CDs with them.

The first decade of the twenty-first century has seen many interesting developments. Scholarship has intensified, exploring the newer as well as older genres, and identifying what has been unearthed so far of the Judeo-Spanish incipits for contrafact singing of Hebrew religious poetry (Seroussi 2009), and recent or upcoming conferences have been devoted to Sephardic music studies. In performance, more scholars are also active as performers, notably around the Mediterranean: they include Miguel Sánchez (Spain), Hadass Pal-Yarden (Israel), Vanessa Paloma (USA/Morocco), Susana Weich-Shahak's ensemble Arbolera (Spain/Israel), as well as highly-trained artists with solid knowledge of the tradition, such as Esti Kenan-Ofri (Israel).

At the same time, a World Music dimension with fusions of flamenco, rock, bossa nova, Afro-Cuban, jazz and other influences has emerged (but at the time of writing, not Ladino hip-hop or rap). Discourse in this context often develops the earlier vocabulary of exoticism and medievality. A diva image has been cultivated by singers such as Yasmin Levy (Israel), while Sarah Aroeste (USA, family from Greece) pioneered the "Ladino rock" movement, continued by groups such as France's "Mazal – Electro-Sepharad" and the American band DeLeon. The latter group has produced perhaps the most mystifying collection of descriptors of their work: while there is nothing new about phrases such as "infused with the deeply mysterious and entrancing cadences of the ancient Sephardic tradition", one can only speculate about what can possibly have been "15th Century Spanish indie rock" ([myspace.com/ilovedeleon](http://myspace.com/ilovedeleon)).

The annual FestiLadino, inaugurated in 2003 in Israel, promotes new compositions – lyrics and music – in Ladino. Most of the songs accepted for the competition are performed with orchestral arrangements, and in general the tone is unapologetically contemporary.

### **Interaction – Judeo-Spanish songs in the Mediterranean**

The Mediterranean countries with communities of Ladino speakers, as we have seen, are Israel, Turkey, Greece, Morocco, Spain, France and, depending on one's definition of "Mediterranean", Bulgaria and countries of former Yugoslavia. In general, musical influence has gone from the local culture to Sephardic communities, rather than the other way around: Greek, Turkish, Balkan, and Moroccan tunes and rhythmic patterns appear in Judeo-Spanish songs, which also absorbed influences from turn-of-the-twentieth century popular music from France and Latin America. At the same time, Jewish musicians were greatly appreciated in North Africa and the Ottoman Empire, although those prominent in this context were general Jewish male singers and instrumentalists working in Hebrew, as well as the local language (Turkish, Greek, Arabic), rather than women of the community singing in Judeo-Spanish, typically in domestic settings.

Except, for obvious reasons, for Israel, the Sephardic presence in these countries is, as we have seen, a fraction of its former numbers. The old, traditional genres of Judeo-Spanish song are disappearing from daily life, replaced mostly by the most recent songs of the tradition. At the same time, the World Music scene's relatively recent interest in Ladino song, and the appearance of international stars such as Yasmin Levy, has sparked some interest among non-Jewish artists in the countries mentioned above. Spain has already been discussed: its special place as the geographic origin of Sephardic culture, and its close linguistic ties have made it a centre for the promotion of Sephardic culture, and many artists perform Sephardic music, most, though not all, from outside the culture. In Israel, besides the scholars, artists and promoters mentioned earlier, the National Authority for Ladino Culture was established in 1996, and there are university programmes in Judeo-Spanish culture. Françoise Atlan, of North African Sephardic, though not Judeo-Spanish, background, has received international acclaim for her work in both Judeo-Spanish and North African music traditions.

Some interesting new developments are taking place in Morocco and the eastern Mediterranean countries. In Morocco, non-Jewish artists such as Samira Kadiri and Amina Alaoui have performed songs in Judeo-Spanish, and the American scholar and singer Vanessa Paloma, recently married into the Sephardic community of Casablanca, has been initiating projects of collaboration. In Greece, Thessaloniki's small but dynamic Sephardic community's songs have become known internationally through the recordings and concerts of Savina Yannatou. Beograd's ensemble "Shira u'tefila" tries to restore the longtime cooperation among Jewish and non-Jewish musicians in the area, and is becoming well-known outside Serbia. In Turkey, the Pasharos Sefardis have been well-known for many years. The group's co-founder and director, Karen Sarhon, also a scholar, plays a central role in projects of Turkey's Sephardic Centre, in collaboration with Sephardic cultural institutions in Israel and Spain. Co-founder Izzet Bana has been having ever-increasing success with his innovative Ladino children's choir. The Janet and Jak Esim duo of Istanbul, also widely respected internationally, frequently collaborates with Turkish musicians. "Sefarad", featuring singer Sam Levi, sold huge numbers of its recordings, though it is not active now. While the Pasharos and the Esims are generally well-liked and appreciated by the Sephardic communities in Turkey, the latter's opinions have been more divided by Levi's pop culture approach; several told me they were especially unhappy with his setting the melody of emblematic para-liturgical song "Cuando el Rey Nimrod" to new lyrics about partying in the holiday town of Bodrum. Recently, some Turkish artists have also been incorporating Judeo-Spanish songs into their own repertoires, sometimes in Turkish translations or adaptations: that is, after centuries of Sephardic Jews adapting Turkish songs into Judeo-Spanish, the opposite is happening, or, rather, both are occurring.<sup>[xix]</sup>

### **Whither Judeo-Spanish songs?**

We know the Jews of pre-Expulsion Sefarad sang, though we do not know what they sang and how they sang it. We know that Sephardic male musicians and poets interacted with their Christian and Muslim counterparts, although we do not know much about the actual music the Sephardic and the Muslim musicians played and sang; nor do we know much about the music in women's daily lives. We also know that the Sephardic women and young people were encouraged by their own rabbis to sing as they departed on the very day of the 1492 expulsion. In their long, and continuing, Mediterranean diaspora, Sephardim continued to sing, and to interact musically with the people of their new homes – or, in the

But the songs are mostly sung in public now: in concert, in recordings, in online contexts. Rarely are they sung in daily life by Sephardim themselves. Many, though certainly not all, of the best-known artists who present the songs in public are not Sephardic and, beyond the songs themselves, know little about Sephardic life: though some have made a point of studying it, few have lived it.

While this has resulted in much original, interesting and aesthetically pleasing music, it raises questions about what constitutes a tradition – does it exist apart from the people who developed it? The singing style, the performance practice, the role of the songs in daily life, have all changed, and, in large part, left the community which created, developed and transmitted the repertoire over several centuries and in geographically far-flung cultures. Can one still speak, then, of a tradition? Or, perhaps, can Judeo-Spanish song survive only as a component of performance and an object of scholarship?

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## Notes

- [i] One should remember that there were three, not one, expulsions from Iberia: from Castile and Aragon in 1492, usually referred to as "the expulsion from Spain"; from Portugal in 1497 and finally from Navarre in 1498.
- [ii] Terminology for the the language remains somewhat contentious. "Judeo-Spanish" is an umbrella term devised to refer to all forms of the language, but many people do not accept it or even know it exists. Local names for the vernacular in the former Ottoman lands include: *spaniol*, *spaniol maestro*, *dzhudezmo*, *dzhidio* and *zhargon*; in Morocco the term is *khaketia*. *Ladino* technically refers only to literal translation from Hebrew religious texts, but is now popularly used to refer to all forms of the language, even by elderly native speakers who had not used the term when growing up, and by some scholars. In Spain, one often hears "*la lengua sefardi*" or simply "*sefardi*". "Sefarad" is the traditional Jewish term for Spain and Portugal, but, as "Sephardic" has come to refer to many non-Ashkenazi Jews besides those descended from Sefarad, "*la lengua sefardi*" is not accurate either. Some people, especially in Cataluña, refer to the language as "judeo-castellano." Orthographic systems continue to be debated, as until the early twentieth century the language was written in a specially modified Hebrew script. Here, I use a modified form of the one used in the Israeli Judeo-Spanish publication *Aki Yerushalayim*. The terms "Ladino" and "Judeo-Spanish" are used here interchangeably. "Sephardim" is the Hebrew plural noun meaning "Sephardic Jews."
- [iii] The Boston-based group "Voice of the Turtle" may be seen as having led the way in the "early music" approach to Judeo-Spanish songs, beginning in the late 1970s.
- [iv] For studies on Sephardic contrafacta, see Katz 1986, Seroussi and Weich-Shahak 1990-1, and Cohen 1990.
- [v] "We should avoid the songs of the uncircumcised, which are nothing but lechery and obscenity; their entire purpose is to lead women astray... Woe to the foolish father and the seducing mother who raise their daughters in this way, leading them in the path of harlotry [cf. Lv 19:29]" (Saperstein 235).
- [vi] see Edwin Seroussi's recent definitive catalogue of incipits, with commentary: Seroussi 2009.
- [vii] Other possibilities have been suggested, especially one based on form: see the introductory section to Hemsí.
- [viii] Studies and anthologies of romances are numerous. Good online sources are Armistead et al., *Folk Literature*

- [x] For information on Sephardic women's notebooks, see Díaz-Más 2007, which also refers to earlier studies on the topic.
- [xi] Non-Spanish speakers also often confuse the terms *romance* and *romancero*, treating the latter as a synonym for the former, rather than understanding its meaning: corpus of *romances*. There seems to be a notion that *romancero* somehow sounds more scientific and knowledgeable than *romance*.
- [xii] For more information about Haim Effendi, see the definitive CDs+book set edited by Seroussi 2009. For Algazi, see Seroussi 1989. For other old recordings and reissues, see Bresler.
- [xiii] See Romero for a wide range of popular compositions, with commentary.
- [xiv] See Hemsí for a scholarly re-edition of the original transcriptions.
- [xv] Seroussi 1995 offers a balanced account of Levy's work, and a critique of scholarly criticisms of his publications.
- [xvi] Gerineldo was founded and directed by Oro Anahory-Librowicz, a Canadian Sephardic scholar born and raised in Morocco; she enlisted khaketía expert and community singer Solly Lévy, as well as Kelly Sultan Amar, a member of Lévy's Sephardic choir, and myself, the only non-Sephardic group member. Later joined by Moroccan Israeli-Canadian violinist Charlie Edry, Gerineldo was active as an ensemble from 1980 to 1994, maintaining its focus on the old Moroccan repertoire and performance practice, with occasional eastern Mediterranean songs and newer genres. The group also performed original musical theatre pieces representing traditional culture, written and directed by Lévy. Some years later, Susana Weich-Shahak, while publishing recordings of her own extensive fieldwork, formed the ensemble, "Arbolera", in Spain, the first ensemble since Gerineldo to present the older repertoire as a major focus, with serious attention to traditional singing styles.
- [xvii] I am deliberately omitting the identity of the singers, to avoid singling out an artist in a negative way. My comments do not imply criticism their musical performances.. For more on the "medieval" phenomenon in Spain, see Cohen 2007.
- [xviii] "Gitano" and "Cigano" will be used here when referring to "Gypsies" of Spain and Portugal respectively, as they themselves do not usually use the term "Roma", except sometimes in foral situations when they have learned it from, for example, international Roma associations. Speculation about musical and other interactions between Sephardic Jews and Gitanos has sometimes been influenced by the situation of Eastern European Jews and Roma, who did indeed share musical practices and sometimes musical occasions. Historically and socially, there are many important differences between the two areas, including, of course, that Jews lived legally and officially – i.e. visibly as Jews – in Spain and Portugal only for the first few decades of the Gitanos' arrival there. Thereafter, until the nineteenth century, any Jews who lived in these countries had to do so as Christians. My experience in Portugal, where the only sizeable Crypto-Jewish community lives (besides the so-called Xuetas of Mallorca, whose situation is entirely different), is that there is only minimal social contact between Crypto-Jews and neighbouring Gitanos (see Cohen, in press). Naturally, this may have been different in the mid-to-late fifteenth century, but until now, any statements about this must be treated as speculation.
- [xix] For more on Sephardic music in Istanbul, see Cohen 2008.

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