Sephardic Art Song: From Folk Roots to Classical Heights

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The late nineteenth-century nationalist movement in Western classical music inspired Sephardic composers to express a cultural identity in their music, which drew them toward Sephardic folk literature. They began to use this material to create sophisticated vocal works in the art song tradition, while keeping the original Ladino texts. This article reviews the history and language of Sephardim in relation to the development of the Sephardic Art Song genre that comprises over 360 songs. The musical elements and stylistic features, Ladino lyric diction, performance practice, as well as prominent composers and works of this genre are also covered.

In his article about voice recitals in the United States, historian James F. Richardson describes Pavarotti's first recital in New York in 1973 as follows:

> Luciano Pavarotti has never strayed from his Italian arias and songs. *The Times* likened his programming to that of John McCormack "with the English-Irish side of the song literature. As McCormack did, so Mr. Pavarotti does, this kind of semi-pop concert with style and vocal beauty. No intellectual records are broken, but everybody has a marvelous time." The clear implication is that if you have that kind of voice you can get away with that kind of program.[1]

In a similar fashion, Spanish soprano Victoria de los Angeles (1923–2005) was applauded for her performances of works in German, French, and her native Spanish, in the United States in the 1950s.[2] There are many more examples of classical singers' incorporation of vocal repertoire from their homelands and culture into their recital programs throughout the twentieth century. This way audiences, as well as singers, became exposed to repertoire and languages outside the canon and developed an appreciation for works that represented different cultures and genres. Today, recent developments in publishing, recording, and internet streaming allow musicians and scholars to have access to the Western classical vocal literature of Iberia, Latin America, Eastern Europe, Scandinavia, Asia, the Middle East, but also the vocal works inspired by melodies and folk literature of native and indigenous peoples, diasporic populations, and other ethnic and minority groups. The growing interest in celebrating these underrepresented works and making repertoire outside the canon more accessible offers singers increased opportunities to explore and perform vocal works that are meaningful to them.

This article aims to introduce a unique, rich, but overlooked vocal repertoire within the Western classical medium, one that also offers a window into the Sephardic culture that reflects diverse influences of the many cultures that the Sephardim encountered throughout their 500-year-long journey.

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What makes the Sephardic Art Song literature unique and rich is its representation of a wide range of cultural exchange, but also its fusion of a variety of musical traditions, including elements of Western classical music of all periods starting from the Medieval era and encompassing Spanish, Moroccan, Balkan, and Greek musical traditions as well as Middle Eastern folk and classical forms. Acknowledgment and celebration of Sephardic songs within the Western classical medium is invaluable for the preservation of an important culture, a dying language, and a beautiful musical tradition that offers a variety of flavors to the twenty-first-century classical singer. To quote scholars Samuel Armistead et al., the song tradition of Sephardim is:

> . . . both medieval and modern; Jewish, Christian, and Islamic; Hispanic, but also Balkan and Near Eastern, and indeed French and Italian as well. [. . .] For all its seeming conservatism, the Sephardic song tradition is a vital, dynamic, creative phenomenon, forever involved in the ongoing process of becoming something different from what it was before.[3]

HISTORY

Sephardim (singular, Sephardi) are commonly known as a diasporic Jewish population who can trace their ancestry to the Iberian Peninsula, specifically to the Jews who were expelled from Spain in 1492 in the wake of the Spanish Inquisition. The Inquisition was established by the Spanish Catholic monarchs King Ferdinand II of Aragon (1452–1516) and Queen Isabella I of Castile (1451–1504). In their pursuit to achieve religious unity in the country, they gave the Muslim Moors and Jews of Spain only two choices: convert to Catholicism or leave. Some did convert to Catholicism to avoid persecution, while about 300,000 Jews from Spain went into exile in different directions: Portugal (from where they were also expelled); Northern Europe; Eastern Europe; and the Mediterranean Basin, including the Ottoman Empire, Northern Africa, and the Middle East.[4] Thus, Sephardic culture spread to Greece, Turkey, North Africa, Palestine, The Netherlands, and Italy, as the Sephardim migrated to these areas following their expulsion from Spain. Unfortunately, these people did not get to take many of their possessions with them, as they were forced to leave, but they did carry with them "the 15th-century Spanish language, from which would come a vernacular Judeo-Spanish language . . . [but they] also carried with them their culture, especially their oral literature, comprising poems, tales and *romansas,* or poems turned into songs, expressing the pain of being exiled and the nostalgia for their former homeland."[5]

Now, what exactly is the Sephardic culture? Although the word Sephardim comes from *Sepharad*, which means "Spain" in medieval Hebrew, the term has a much broader meaning.[6] As Haim Henry Toledano states in his book *The Sephardic Legacy*, Sephardic tradition is a system of values, institutions, ethnic traits, and attitudes that originated in North Africa and the Middle East (especially Baghdad), and evolved among Jews living within the orbit of the Islamic world in these areas beginning in the early Middle Ages, before it arrived in the Iberian Peninsula.[7] Therefore, it would be wrong to assume that the Sephardic culture is merely a fusion of Jewish and Spanish cultures. To have a better perception of the Sephardic culture, the term *diaspora* should be well-understood. The word "diaspora" comes from the Greek language, which means "scattering and dispersion." In his article "Jewish Music and Diaspora," Edwin Seroussi maintains that "diaspora is most effective as an explanatory tool when applied, simply, to 'the existence of an identified population that feels that it is away from its homeland, however imagined, however distant in time and space' and more subtly, that 'it involves more than demographics [. . .] some sort of consciousness of separation, a gap, a disjuncture must be present.'"[8] Based on this definition, one can conclude that the Jewish populations in the early medieval period in Western Europe, North Africa, and the Arab and Persian Near East were already diasporic populations. The forced and voluntary migrations from these locations later created further displacements, of course.

As Seroussi points out, the expulsion of the Jews from Spain resulted in a "classic example of a second-stage displacement that sometimes generated an overemphasized longing for a lost homeland. . . . [and] music became the field of cultural expression in which diaspora had one of its strongest showings against its rhetorical negation."[9]

Sephardim had initially migrated to Eastern Europe, North Africa, and the Arab and Persian Near East from Spain in 1492; however, there have been further displacements since then. Today, Sephardim are inclusive

of "the Ladino-speaking Sephardim of Turkey and other Balkan countries; the Spanish and Portuguese Sephardim of Amsterdam, London, and New York and other US cities; the Middle Eastern Sephardim of Egypt, Iraq, and Syria; and the Sephardim of North Africa," as well as Latin America.[10] Especially in the twenty-first century, it is rather challenging to define Sephardism from an ethnic, geographical, or linguistic point of view; the only valid definition can be a cultural one. Meanwhile, there is a fascinating fact that a certain Spanish element in the Sephardic identity endured long after any connection to Spain did. In her book *The Jews of Spain*, Jane Gerber exemplifies this as she writes:

> How strange it seems that Sephardim scattered in Turkey and Bulgaria, Curaçao and Pernambuco, sang ballads about medieval Spanish knights and maidens in their Medieval Spanish language, Ladino. Throughout the Turkish-speaking world, the conversation of Sephardic Jews, especially women, would be peppered with Spanish proverbs. The classical genres of Spanish oral literature would be preserved for centuries in the Balkans in romances as each important life-cycle event was marked by Jewish festivities rich in Spanish song.[11]

LANGUAGE

The Sephardim expelled from Spain carried with them their most precious belonging: the fifteenth-century Spanish language. The language of Sephardim is often referred to as *Ladino, Judeo-Espagnol,* or *Djudezmo.* Ladino primarily reflects fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Castilian Spanish, enriched with elements from Gallego-Portuguese, Catalan-Valencian, Aragonese, Hebrew, Turkish, Arabic, and additional languages, including Greek, French, Italian, and various Balkan languages.[12] Surprisingly, Hebrew has minimal presence in Ladino, whereas the language exhibits significant traces of Turkish, French, Italian, and Greek, incorporating words and expressions from the cultures of the regions where the Sephardim settled.[13] It is crucial to point out that Ladino "is not a series of juxtapositions [of all these languages mentioned]; but it is a complex code one of whose constituent parts is multilingualism and the play on languages."[14] A certain linguistic creativity is inherent to Judeo-Spanish, which has even been used as a vehicle for expressing verbal revenge, through humor, in an oppressive society. As Marie-Christine Varol clarifies:

> Irony, distance, puns, the endless plays on meanings and stylistic nuances bouncing back and forth, make this language of quotations, double entendres, discreet jokes that seem undecipherable, of implied or overly-clear meanings, into an original and eternally renewed linguistic system steeped in a devastating sense of humor that can only be achieved through a knowledge of several languages—a knowledge that gives it its strength, its richness and its freedom.[15]

Today Judeo-Spanish is spoken sporadically in large European and American cities, but more consistently in Turkey (in cities like Istanbul and Izmir) and in Israel.[16] The term "Ladino" refers to the more corrupt Judeo-Spanish vernacular spoken mainly by the Sephardim of the Eastern Mediterranean.

SEPHARDIC FOLK SONGS

The traditional, secular Sephardic song repertoire can be divided into three main genres: *romances, coplas*, and *cantigas*, and the collections of these songs are named *romancero, coplas*, and *cancionero* respectively. These genres are defined based on musical parameters, such as structure, melody, and rhythm, and based on the text and the relationship between the music and text. Their function in a community also contributes to their categorization.

Romances are narrative poems with a well-defined textual and musical structure, like the French *ballade*. There is always a narrative that is mostly related to the Spanish Middle Ages—involving stories and tales of kings and queens, knights, prisoners, faithful and unfaithful wives, as well as classical, historical, and biblical themes.

Coplas are strophic poems that have definite structures, and are sung with strophic melodies. Their distinctive characteristic is that their music clearly reflects the influence of the surrounding musical cultures. These songs are associated with Jewish tradition and history, values and beliefs, and social and political events. They can revolve around important community figures, economic hardship, specific holidays, or moral themes. This genre flourished in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when they were published in Istanbul, Salonica, Vienna, and Livorno—and therefore, the texts tend to be more modern.[17]

Cantigas are similar to coplas in their versatility of texts and music, but more importantly, in their adoption of the surrounding musical cultures. Some of these songs are translations or adaptations of Turkish and Balkan songs, and they can feature dance tunes, such as foxtrot and tango, and can also quote stage works, including operettas and zarzuelas. Cantigas differ from the other two genres in textual and musical structure. Cantigas mostly have four stanzas and often a refrain as well. They are set to strophic melodies with a different tune for the refrain. Unlike romances and coplas, cantigas do not have a narrative or coherent texts. Their subject matter is mostly lyric, dealing with love, longing, courting, mourning, and even drinking.[18]

Texts

Texts of traditional Sephardic songs are generally aanonymous—a common characteristic of the folk genre, as the texts of folk songs are rarely written down and are usually orally transmitted. This creates a problem when tracing back the origins of these texts. Some scholars of Sephardic music were able to discover the time and origin of a large portion of these songs, although not necessarily the authors or poets of the texts specifically.

Texts of these songs are quite straightforward, and they rarely require literary research to reveal any potential undertones. They can have a variety of themes, including the stories and tales from the Spanish Middle Ages, themes associated with the Jewish culture and history, and lyrical themes. Although most of these texts have anonymous authors, the origins of more recent songs throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries can exhibit connections to other popular music genres that surrounded Sephardic communities during these eras. Some of the texts are simply translations that were adopted from other genres, such as zarzuelas, tangos, French chansons, and Greek and Turkish songs. Some twentieth-century Sephardic folk song musicians, such as Flory Jagoda (1923–2021) and Jack Mayesh (1899–1969), contributed to the genre with their own original texts and compositions, as well as adaptations of songs from other genres, translating them into Ladino.[19]

Music

Since the Sephardic repertoire represents such a wide range of cultural exchange, the musical analyses of these songs require a vast musical knowledge, including the Western classical music of all periods; Spanish, Moroccan, Balkan, and Greek musical traditions; and Turkish folk and classical forms, including *maqam*.[20] Maqām (pl. maqamat) is defined as "the main modal unit of Arabic, Turkish, and Persian music, or the Middle Eastern modal practice in general."[21] Maqamat scales are melodic modal scales that do not have a rhythmic component. This modal system differs greatly from the Western chromatic system, also known as the 12-tone notation system. For example, the Turkish maqamat system involves twenty-four pitches that are a quarter tone apart from one another. Each Turkish maqam scale consists of seven pitches of different intervalic sequences, and each scale has a different melodic development. The notation of these extra pitches requires some accidentals not found in Western classical notation.

The Arabic maqamat system has even more pitches, some of which are microtones even smaller than quarter tones. There are about seventy-two maqam scales that are used in Middle Eastern art music. Thus, composition and analyses of such music can be quite complex.[22]

Sephardic music possesses some maqam flavor, although not in such complexity. Some common maqam intervals (such as augmented seconds) are essential to this repertoire, as they are the intervals that give the songs a Middle Eastern flavor. In twentieth and twenty-first century Sephardic art songs, these intervals are incorporated in the songs with a tonal compositional approach and the melodies are both modal and tonal in character.

Another musical characteristic of Sephardic music is compound rhythms used in complex rhythmic patterns. Rhythms such as 5/8, 7/8, or 9/8, for example, are quite common in this repertoire.

The Sephardic folk song repertoire is essentially vocal, although musical instruments were also used at times, mostly on special occasions. When instruments were involved in the performances of these songs at family gatherings or at bigger occasions, the typical instruments used were percussion instruments, such as tambourine, and mandolin or oud, which is a stringed instrument that belongs to the lute family. Other percussion instruments used included castanets, finger-cymbals, *darbuga* (or *dumbelek)*, and *baraban*.[23]

Sephardic folk songs, as opposed to their Western classical art song settings, incorporate a lot of improvisation as well. This is hardly surprising as these songs were transmitted orally for hundreds of years, and oral transmission encourages personal improvisation that often consists of lavish ornamentation and relatively free rhythm.[24] Thus, melodies of the same Sephardic songs can differ tremendously from community to community, or generation to generation.

It is important to acknowledge the work of all the Sephardic music scholars, who have spent significant amounts of time and effort to travel to all Sephardic communities all around the world, interview members of these communities, have them sing to them, transcribe and study all the songs and poems collected, and publish compilations of these folk songs.

SEPHARDIC ART SONGS

Early twentieth-century Western classical composers' interest in collecting and arranging these Sephardic songs can be traced back to the prevailing nationalist movement in music in the nineteenth century. In the late nineteenth century and the first decade of twentieth-century Russia, young Jewish composers of the time were inspired by the nationalist movement in Russian music exemplified by the group of Russian composers nicknamed "The Five."

Jewish composers became attracted to "the new universalist aesthetics of modernist abstraction with a particular commitment to representing Jewish identity in music."[25] They collected and transcribed perhaps thousands of Yiddish folk songs. This Jewish national revival inspired some other European classical composers to incorporate Jewish musical elements into their compositions as well. A similar interest was observed in the Sephardic musical realm pioneered by the Turkish-Jewish composer and ethnomusicologist Alberto Hemsi (1898–1975).[26]

Alberto Hemsi was from Turgutlu (a.k.a. Cassaba in the Ottoman Empire), a district in Manisa, on the west coast of Turkey. Born into an Italian-Sephardic family in Turgutlu, he studied composition with Shemtov Shikayar and cantorial music with Isaac Algazi (1889–1950), who was also a collector of Sephardic folk songs, at the Société Musicale Israélite in Izmir. Hemsi received a scholarship to the Milan Conservatory, where he studied theory, solfège, orchestration, history, composition, and piano, until his studies were interrupted by war service. After serving in the Italian army during World War I and getting severely injured, he returned to Izmir in 1919, and began his career as a pianist, choral conductor, and music teacher. By 1920, he had already begun to collect and transcribe the Sephardic songs and poems in Izmir and Rhodes. He then extended his research to Thessaloniki, Jerusalem, and Alexandria. Hemsi not only contributed to the genre through his field work, but he also arranged and harmonized about sixty of these songs with a Western classical approach. Hemsi is often referred to as the Turkish Béla Bartók (1881–1945)—the Bartók of Sephardic music.[27]

Hemsi was not the only one who showed interest in arranging Sephardic folk songs in the Western classical tradition. As of August 2024, based on archival research and interviews with musicians and scholars of Sephardic music, the author has identified forty-seven Western classical composers who have arranged or composed over 360 Sephardic songs for voice and various instruments in varying degrees of complexity (see Table 1). While some of these works are arrangements, some are original works, inspired by Sephardic melodies and/or texts. The composers listed in Table 1 either identified themselves with the Sephardic culture or were inspired by this culture or repertoire, while others were commissioned by organizations or individuals to create Sephardic works. The catalog currently includes composers from Turkey, Israel, Spain, Italy, Germany, France, Bulgaria, the United States, Canada, Puerto Rico, and other countries. Twentieth- and twenty-first-century composers not only resurrected Sephardic songs, but also initiated a new art song genre. After finding so many Sephardic vocal works in the Western classical tradition and cataloging them all, the author took the liberty of giving the genre a name: Sephardic Art Song.

LADINO LYRIC DICTION

How does one engage with a language that is neither standardized nor consistent across a diasporic population? In his presentation on challenges of working with Ladino, scholar Isaac Jack Levy emphasizes how each Sephardic community spells and pronounces Ladino in

TABLE 1. Sephardic Art Song Composers and Works

COMPOSERS	WORKS	PUBLISHER and YEAR
Lazare Saminsky (1882–1959)	* Op. 13, No.1 Rachelina *The Second Hebrew Song Cycle, op.13*	New York: Carl Fisher Inc., 1921
Lucien L. Bernheim (1884?–1944?)	* *Cinq Chansons Populaires Judéo-Espagnoles*	Zagreb: Edition Omanut, 1939
José Antonio de Donostia (1886–1956)	* *Canciones Sefardíes*	Tolosa: Gráficas Laborda y Labayen, 1943
Vincente Emilio Sojo (1887–1974)	* *Nueve Canciones de los Sefardíes de Salonica*	Caracas: Publisher information unavailable, 1964
Léon Algazi (1890–1971)	* *Quatre Mélodies Judéo-Espagnoles*	Paris: Éditions Salabert, 1951
Joachim Stutschewsky (1891–1982)	* *Two Sephardic Prayers*	Tel Aviv: OR-TAV, Music Publications, 1973
Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco (1895–1968)	* *Three Sephardic Songs*	Tel Aviv: Israeli Music Publications; New York: Leeds Music, 1959
Paul Ben-Haim (1897–1984)	* *Three Songs Without Words*	Tel Aviv: Israeli Music Publications,1953
Alberto Hemsi (1898–1975)	* *Coplas Sefardies, opp. 7, 8, 13, 18, 22, 34, 41, 44, 45, 51*	Alexandria: Édition orientale de musique, 1933–73
Menahem Bensussan (1901–1970)	* *Seven Sephardic Folksongs*	Archive of Menahem Bensusson, Series A: Compositions (Manuscripts), Item No. 60–63
Mieczyslaw Kolinski (1901–1981)	*Seven Sephardic Folksongs*	Vancouver: Canadian Music Centre, 1977?
Joaquin Rodrigo (1901–1999)	* *Cuatro Canciones Sefardíes*	Madrid: Ediciones Joaquin Rodrigo, 1992
Herbert Fromm (1905–1995)	*Four Psalms*	New York: Transcontinental Publications, 1971
Wolf Simoni (a.k.a. Louis Saguer, 1907–1991)	* *Cuatro Cánticas Sefardíes*	Paris: La Sirène Musicale; Max Eschig, 1937
Joaquin Nin-Culmell (1908–2004)	* *Six Chansons Populaires Séphardiques*	Paris: Max Eschig, 1986
Richard J. Neumann (1915–1984)	*° *Ladino Collection: For Solo Voice and Accompaniment,* Anthology of Jewish Art Song, Vol. I *° *The Nico Castel Ladino Song Book* * *Yom Gila*, *Sephardic Song of Joy*	New York: Transcontinental Music, 2007 Cedarhurst: Tara Publications, 1981 New York: Transcontinental Music Publications, 1975
Roberto Plá Sales (1915–2004)	° *Cuatro Canciones Sefardíes*	Madrid: Unión Musical Española,1965
Matilde Salvador (1918–2007)	° *Endechas y Cantares de Sefarad*	Madrid: Ópera Tres, Ediciones Musicales, 2000
Manuel Valls (1920–1984)	° *Canciones Sefarditas*	Madrid: Unión Musical Española, 1975
Yehezkel Braun (1922–2014)	* *Seven Sephardic Romances*	Tel Aviv: Israel Music Institute, 1987
Ramón Barce (1928–2008)	° *Entre las huertas paseando* ° *Levantéis vos*	Publisher information unavailable, 1960
Jules Levy (1930–2006)	* *Canciones Sepharadicas*	Publisher information unavailable
Manuel Angulo López-Casero (b.1930)	*Ocho Canciones Sefardíes*	Publisher information unavailable, 1958–60
Samuel Milligan (1932–2019)	*Nine Sephardic Songs*	San Antonio: Ars Musicæ Hispaniæ a division of Wings Press, 2015
Mario Davidovsky (1934–2019)	*Ladino Songs* *Sefarad: Four Spanish-Ladino Folksongs*	New York: C.F. Peters Corporation, 2017 New York: C.F. Peters Corporation, 2016
Shimon Cohen (b.1937)	*Seven Sephardic Folk Songs*	Tel Aviv: Israel Music Institute, date unknown
Manuel García Morante (b. 1937)	* *40 Canciones Sefardíes*	Barcelona: M. García Morante, 1983
Lorenzo Palomo (1938–2024)	° Madrigal y *Cinco Canciones Sefardíes*	Leipzig: Friedrich Hofmeister Musikverlag, 2006

(table continues)

TABLE 1. **Sephardic Art Song Composers and Works** *(continued)*

COMPOSERS	WORKS	PUBLISHER and YEAR
Simon Sargon (1938–2022)	* *At Grandfather's Knee: A Cycle of Five Judeo-Spanish Folk Songs*	New York: Transcontinental Music, 1998
Sid Robinovitch (b.1942)	*Rodas Recordada*	Toronto: Canadian Music Centre, 2005
Diane Thome (b.1942)	*Levadi*	Publisher information unavailable, 1985 For more information: www.dianethome.com
Alexander Knapp (b.1945)	* *Four Sephardi Songs*	New York: Transcontinental Music, 1992
Frederic Hand (b.1947)	*Sephardic Songs*	Los Angeles: Ludwin Music, 1996
Daniel Akiva (b.1953)	° *Jewish-Spanish Song Cycle* ° *Sarina Kanta*	Tel Aviv: OR-TAV Music Publications, 1999 Tel Aviv: OR-TAV Music Publications, 2015
Raymond Goldstein (b.1953)	* *Sephardic Songs*	Publisher information unavailable, 1986, 1998, 2003
Roberto Sierra (b.1953)	*Cancionero Sefardí* *Songs from the Diaspora*	New York: Subito Music Pub., 1999 Verona, NJ: Subito Music, 2007
Betty Olivero (b.1954)	*Cantes Amargos* *Juego de Siempre: 12 Folk Songs in Ladino*	Tel Aviv: Israel Music Institute, 2016 Tel Aviv: Israel Music Institute, 2020
Bruce Adolphe (b.1955)	*Ladino Songs of Love and Suffering*	Publisher information unavailable, 1985. For more information: www.bruceadolphe.net
Ofer Ben-Amots (b.1955)	* *Kantigas Ulvidades* * *Songs from the Pomegrenate Garden (Kantes del Verdgel de Granadas)*	Colorado Springs: Composer's Own Press, 2010 Colorado Springs: Composer's Own Press, 2010 For more information: www.oferbenamots.com
Dušan Bogdanović (b.1955)	° *Deux Chansons Sépharades*	Saint Romuald, Québec: Doberman-Yppan, 2010
Turgay Erdener (b.1957)	* *Adio Querida*	Publisher information unavailable
Osvaldo Golijov (b.1960)	*Ayre*	New York: Hendon Music; Boosey & Hawkes, 2014
Brian T. Field (b.1967)	* *Durme, Durme, Kerido Ijico*	New York: Brian T. Field; Olim Music, 2018. For more information: www.brianfield.com
Shai Cohen (b. 1968)	*Two Ladino Songs* (In Hebrew, inspired by Ladino texts)	Tel Aviv: Israel Music Center-Music Publishing, 2004
Andrew Zohn (b.1970)	° *8 Sephardic Songs*	Saint Romuald, Quebec: Les Productions d'OZ Inc., 2011
Renan Koen (b.1971)	* *Sephardic Songs*	Publisher information unavailable For more information: www.renankoen.com
Francisco Javier Jáuregui (b.1974)	*Sephardic Songs*	Publisher information unavailable For more information: www.javierjauregui.com
Delilah Gutman (b.1978)	*13 Jewish Songs*	Bologna: Ut Orpheus Ed., 2014
William Kenlon (b.1983)	*Two Sephardic Songs*	Publisher information unavailable, 2018 For more information: www.williamkenlon.com
Ulrike Merk (b.?)	° *Sephardische Lieder*	Vienna: Doblinger, 2013
Pedro Elias (b.?)	° *Siete Canciones Sefardies*	Madrid: Unión Musical Española, 1985
Juan Miguel Nieto (b.?)	° *Cuatro Canciones: Para Voz y Guitarra Sobre Melodías Populares Sefardíes*	Madrid: Fomento Musical Arte Nuevo, 2016
Borja Mariño (b.?)	* *Cuatro Canciones Antiguas Sobre Textos Sefardíes*	Publisher information unavailable For more information: www.borjamarino.com
James E. Bobb (b?)	*Adio Kerida*	Publisher information unavailable

*(Symbol * indicates works for voice and piano and ° indicates works for voice and guitar. Other works are for voice and another instrument, voice and chamber ensemble, or voice and orchestra.)*

TABLE 2. Ladino Vowels

VOWELS					
Letter	IPA Symbol	Ladino	Spanish	English	Other
i	[i]	m**i**, **i**ja, amar**i**yo	m**i**, **i**ja	b**ee**t	f**i**n**i**t**i** (Italian)
e	[e]	d**e**, **e**l, k**e**ro	d**e,** **e**lla, p**e**ro	_	l**e**gale (Italian)
a	[ɑ]	esp**a**nyol	esp**a**ñol, **a**lm**a**	_	b**a**s, **â**me (French)
o	[o]	b**o**ka	b**oc**a, **or**o, canci**ó**n	_	d**o**lce, s**o**spir**o** (Italian)
u	[u]	kom**u**nidad	com**u**nidad	b**oo**t	f**u**gare (Italian)
u	[w]	f**u**ego, f**u**i, ag**u**a	p**u**esta, c**u**arto	_	g**u**erra (Italian)
ö	[ø]	m**ö**syö	_	_	h**ö**ren (German)
ü	[y]	b**ü**ro	_	_	f**ü**r, gr**ü**n (German)

their own way.[28] Although considered a Romance language, Ladino was initially written in Hebrew and Arabic characters, which contributes to the lack of uniformity in the transcriptions of Ladino into Latin characters.

Due to the differences in consonant and vowel sounds between Ladino and modern Spanish, Ladino and Hebrew, and Ladino and Arabic, the consonant and vowel sounds in Ladino were transcribed differently by scholars depending on their own native languages.[29] For example, the sound [k] could be written with a c, q, qu, k, or ch, depending on the person transcribing it. One Sephardic community could use the letter j for the [x] sound, while others used the same letter for other sounds, such as [ʎ] or [ʒ]. Similarly, one could find the word [diʃo] spelled as disho, dixo, or dišo.[30] A similar complexity presents itself in the case of a diphthong as well. Levy describes how some Eastern Sephardic communities avoid the diphthong [ei] in written form, although it exists in Ladino. For example, the word *reina*, meaning queen, could be spelled rena, but pronounced [reina].[31]

What increases the complexity of Ladino diction is its adoption of words and sounds from other languages that different Sephardic communities were exposed to, such as Turkish, Italian, French, Serbo-Croatian, Greek, or Arabic. Based on the languages surrounding different Sephardic communities, pronunciation of Ladino and vocabulary used can vary significantly from community to community.[32]

The information above is crucial for those who are interested in performing Sephardic songs, since texts of these songs will reflect this lack of uniformity in the spelling and pronunciation of the Ladino language. In her fieldwork, anthropologist and ethnomusicologist Jessica Roda observed that members of the Sephardic community in France found Sephardic song performances to be more authentic when the Ladino text was pronounced accurately.[33] Some music scores offer help in how to pronounce the Ladino texts of these songs. While few composers have included IPA transcriptions of the Ladino texts they used in their published works, some preferred to include a table of vowels and consonants to serve as a guide for diction; however, most published Sephardic art song works do not offer information on how to pronounce the texts.

Tables 2 and 3 are a diction guide for those who are interested in performing Sephardic songs. It should be emphasized that the consonants and vowels listed, as well as their IPA transcriptions, are by no means an attempt to achieve a standardized spelling or pronunciation system for Ladino. Acknowledging the complexity of the task and the endeavors of many linguists in their pursuit of achieving this almost-impossible goal, Tables 2 and 3 are merely to guide singers in deciphering the Ladino texts.

It should be noted that there are exceptions to the rules presented, as well as differences in pronunciation from community to community. The tables of Ladino diction are created by combining several sources, as well as the author's personal experiences with the language as a Ladino speaker.[34]

PERFORMANCE PRACTICE

Performances of traditional Sephardic songs encourage creativity, as ornamentation and rhythmic freedom are

TABLE 3. Ladino Consonants

CONSONANTS						
Letter	IPA Symbol	Ladino	Spanish	English	Other	Explanation
b	[b]	**b**arko, **b**ever, djum**b**a	**b**arco	**b**oy	**b**atti (Italian)	beginning of a word or after m
b	[β]	de**b**asho	tu**b**o, ha**b**a	_	_	between vowels, bilabial fricative
c	[s]	re**c**intados, ha**c**es	**c**errar, **c**ielo	**s**ave	**s**ouffler (French)	preceding i, e
c	[k]	**c**uando, **c**alleja, **c**on	**c**astillo, **c**orason	**c**arpet	**c**afé (French)	preceding a, o, u
ç	[s]	cora**ç**ón	**c**errar, **c**ielo	**s**ave	**s**ouffler (French)	
ch	[tʃ]	**ch**iko, no**ch**e, mun**ch**o	_	**ch**ur**ch**	**c**erto (Italian)	
d	[d]	**d**espues, **d**anyo, bo**d**re	**d**espués	**d**og	**d**iva (Italian)	
d	[ð]	de**d**o, bo**d**a	mi**d**o, ver**d**a**d**	**th**ose	_	between vowels
dj	[dʒ]	**dj**ente, **dj**énero, a**dj**ile	_	**g**ender	**g**entile (Italian)	
f	[f]	**f**ransé, **f**aktor, ba**f**o	**f**actor	**f**air	**f**ato (Italian)	
f	[x]	**f**ui, es**f**uenyo	**g**ente	_	Ba**ch** (German)	fricative velar
g	[g]	**g**rande, **g**uay, **g**odro	**g**rande	**g**allon	**g**ala (Italian)	
g	[dʒ]	**g**ente, **g**énero, **g**entil	_	**g**ender	**g**entile (Italian)	if a word begins with **ge**
g	[ɣ]	a**g**ua, dju**g**ueves	fra**g**uar, jue**g**o	_	_	fricative velar
h	[x]	**h**a**h**am, **h**azino	**g**ente	_	**H**anukah (Hebrew)	sometimes as [X]
j	[ʒ]	**j**o, kale**j**a, mo**j**ado	_	vi**s**ion	**j**ournal (French)	
ǰ	[dʒ]	**ǰ**usto	_	**j**ust, **g**ender	**g**entile (Italian)	
k	[k]	**k**uanto, **k**e, asu**k**ar	**c**uanto, **q**ue	**c**arpet	**c**afé (French)	
kh	[k]	ze**kh**ut, mala**kh**im	**c**uanto, **q**ue	**c**arpet	**c**afé (French)	
ky	[kj]	**ky**öshé, **ky**uprí	_	than**k** **y**ou	_	
l	[l]	**l**una, **l**eche, ka**l**e	**l**uz	**l**eaf	**l**ibertà (Italian)	
ll	[j] or [ʎ]	e**ll**a, **ll**uvia	**ll**ama	**y**es	soleil, bri**ll**ant (French)	
m	[m]	**m**a**m**á, ko**m**e, **m**eza	lla**m**a, **m**esa	**m**other	**m**entre (Italian)	
n	[n]	**n**umero, **n**ada, lo**n**so	**n**úmero	**n**ever	**n**umero (Italian)	
ny	[ɲ]	a**ny**o, i**ny**ervos, Espa**ny**a	a**ñ**o	_	champa**gn**e (French)	
ñ	[ɲ]	monta**ñ**as	a**ñ**o	_	champa**gn**e (French)	
p	[p]	**p**a**p**ú, **p**remio	**p**remio	**p**ebble	**p**orto (Italian)	
r	[ɾ]	**r**atón, bod**r**e, ka**r**o	ca**r**o	_	teso**r**o (Italian)	
rr	[r]	pe**rr**o, ka**rr**o, bo**rr**acho	ca**rr**o	_	gue**rr**a (Italian)	
s	[s]	**s**ielo, **s**in, lon**s**o	**c**ielo, **s**in	**s**ave	**s**ouffler (French)	
s	[z]	ro**s**a, ca**s**a	mu**s**go, ha**z**lo	**z**ebra	ro**s**a, ca**s**a (Italian)	between vowels
s	[z]	fruta**s**, noche**s**	mu**s**go, ha**z**lo	**z**ebra	ro**s**a, ca**s**a (Italian)	at the end of a word
sh	[ʃ]	ko**sh**o, di**sh**o, bu**sh**kar	_	**sh**are	**sc**ena (Italian)	
š	[ʃ]	di**š**o	_	**sh**are	**sc**ena (Italian)	
t	[t]	**t**adre, **t**odo, **t**ambien, pa**t**o	**t**ambién	**t**ender	**t**an**t**o (Italian)	

(table continues)

TABLE 3. **Ladino Consonants** *(continued)*

CONSONANTS						
Letter	IPA Symbol	Ladino	Spanish	English	Other	Explanation
v	[v]	be**v**er, **v**ozós, li**v**ro, **v**edre	_	**v**ictory	**v**oce (Italian)	
x	[ʃ]	ko**sh**o, di**sh**o, bu**sh**kar	_	**sh**are	**sc**ena (Italian)	
y	[j]	**y**erva, luv**y**a, **y**a, boyo	**ll**ama	**y**ear	soleil, bri**ll**ant (French)	
z	[z]	me**z**a, ka**z**a, ra**z**on	mu**s**go, ha**z**lo	**z**ebra	ro**s**a, ca**s**a (Italian)	
ž	[ʒ]	i**ž**o, mu**ž**er	_	vi**si**on	**j**ournal (French)	

two of the essential characteristics of the genre. This repertoire was orally preserved for centuries through oral transmission from generation to generation; oral transmission encourages improvisation. A similar creative and flexible approach in performing the Sephardic art song repertoire could contribute to achieving a more authentic performance.

In his study of Isaac Levy's *Chants judeo-espagnols*, Edwin Seroussi draws attention to the elimination of non-tempered pitches as a result of the piano being the instrument of accompaniment, the structuring of free melodies with no clear pulse into fixed rhythms, and simplified (and sometimes eliminated) melismas.[35] He concludes that the main stylistic elements of the traditional Sephardic songs were naturally removed in the process of arranging them in the Western classical tradition.

A similar consequence is observed in the Iberian and Latin American art song repertoire. Soprano and musicologist Patricia Caicedo emphasizes this stylistic detail as follows:

> Even when songs are printed in scores, in performance there are elements that cannot be captured on paper: vocal inflections, pronunciation, particular intonations, character, and pauses. All these subjective elements are derived from the knowledge that the performer has of the work and its context; these elements from the complex fabric of elements involved in the performance of song . . . Style is nothing more than a reflection of culture and environment projected onto a specific individual . . . as a result of their training process, academically trained performers often lose intuitive skills needed to learn melodies by ear, their ability to imitate vocal inflections and, in general, they lose spontaneity and skills folk musicians have to learn by ear and imitation. In addition to this, academic musicians are governed by written music, which limits them to producing only sounds that are written on paper, losing sight of the fact that musical notation was from the beginning, an attempt to capture the music made by ear and the notation itself can not contain all the twists, accents, intentions and emotionality of the sound experience.[36]

Catalan composer and pianist Manuel García Morante (b.1937) supported this argument in a personal interview with the author about his *40 Canciones Sefardíes*.[37] Morante's late wife, Argentinian mezzo-soprano Myriam Alió (1930–2018), had a Sephardic heritage and sang many of the traditional Sephardic songs in their home. Meanwhile, having collaborated with great classical singers of his time, such as Victoria de los Ángeles, Conxita Badia, Carmen Busamente, and Myriam Alió, Morante was thoroughly familiar with the Western classical vocal repertoire. Thus, as his wife sang these traditional Sephardic songs, he enjoyed creating his original accompaniments to them, which were based on his Western classical training and art song expertise. Eventually, he decided to notate these arrangements and publish them under the title *40 Canciones Sefardíes*. During our conversation about his work, Morante mentioned that these Sephardic melodies had many ornamentations, which were notated in a rigid structure due to the limitations of Western classical notation. When inquired about how to approach singing them, he responded that the ornamentations were meant to be sung in free and flexible rhythm, in accord with the style.[38]

These comments suggest that both the singer and the accompanying instruments are expected to be more flexible in rhythm in Sephardic art song, albeit within a stylistic context. Singers interested in performing this repertoire should familiarize themselves with the stylistic

elements and performance practice of Iberian art song, but also those of zarzuelas, French foxtrots and chansons, tangos, Turkish songs, Greek tragoudis, and other genres that influenced the Sephardic repertoire.[39] This may result in incorporating different vocal styles into the performance and experimenting with vocal gestures and timbre. It goes without saying that a healthy vocal production should not be compromised in the process.

The obvious and perhaps the easiest (although frequently overlooked) approach in understanding the performance practice of a genre that is rooted in a particular culture and geography is studying that culture and geography, but also the people, their gestures, and body language. One could argue that folk music is one of the genres that reflect the people and culture of a region (or nation) in the most visible way; a folk singer represents their culture and environment, "their neighborhood, customs, and social-cultural-historical-geographical milieu."[40]

When preparing a Western classical vocal work that represents non-Western European regions and cultures, minority groups, and diasporic populations, a singer may want to consider studying the folk music of that region or population. Such performance analysis is highly effective in assessment of the key elements pertinent to performance practice.

Sephardic music is among the popular genres performed in world music concerts and festivals. Some notable singers associated with traditional (and popular) Sephardic vocal music that would be helpful to study are Flory Jagoda (1923–2021), Yasmin Levy (b.1975), Gerard Edery (b.1958), and Judith Cohen (b.1949). There are also numerous Sephardic music ensembles that regularly perform in festivals around the world and contribute to the genre with their recordings. Although the names mentioned above do have a Sephardic heritage, most musicians of the Sephardic folk genre today are non-Sephardic or non-Jewish artists.[41]

In her fieldwork among Sephardic communities in France regarding the Sephardic experience, Jessica Roda observed that for Sephardic people, an authentic Sephardic music performance evoked a feeling of connection to a shared "Jewish past in the Ottoman Empire."[42]

> During and after these performances, this common sephardicness is embodied through an exchange of emotion as well as sounds, eye contact, touch, words and stories related to the shared past. During the event, it can be argued that the singer embodied the figure of the Sephardic mother who transmits secular cultural heritage to the next generation.[43]

In Roda's observations of the Sandra Bessis Trio's performance at the *Tres Culturas* festival in Murcia, Spain, she remarks on Bessis's gestures and body movement throughout the trio's performance of Sephardic songs, such as, "Gesture is at the heart of Sandra's performance, resembling an actual score in which we can read the meaning of the text . . . Bessis sits down to perform the song Ven kerida . . . leading Sandra to move her hands even more, along with her lower body, in a few dance steps, before she begins singing, while gently swaying."[44]

Roda's observations suggest that gestures and body language used in Sephardic music performances are closer to those employed in Iberian and Latin American, and possibly in Middle Eastern music performances, than the German *Lied* or French *m*èlodie. Considering the many cultures that formed the Sephardic culture, folk elements, as well as the non-Western musical elements that give the music its unique flavor, it would only be appropriate to allow the body to have more freedom when performing Sephardic art songs. Nevertheless, it should be emphasized that the gestures incorporated must be within the cultural codes and styles associated with Sephardic music, and must serve the music and text.

FINAL WORDS

The increasing diversity in Western classical vocal literature not only expands and enriches our musical palette, but it also offers us more tools and resources to better communicate with a diverse audience, to promote mutual understanding, and to encourage unity and togetherness. Sephardic music is among the genres that represent this ideology of living together, as these songs can be traced back to times in medieval Spain, when people of different religions and ethnicities lived in harmony together for centuries.

These songs also represent the numerous cultures the Sephardim encountered and were heavily influenced by throughout their journey in history. Sephardic folk songs can be rooted in a Jewish culture; however, they also possess the literature and music of Iberia, as well

as the Middle East and Eastern Europe, to name a few. Turkish and Arabic maqam scales are incorporated into the melodies as frequently as Balkan rhythms. Substitution of Christian themes in Sephardic songs can be observed, while some of the songs tell stories of biblical and historical figures.[45] Some of the songs are quite festive and simple in character, while some address the human condition. Meanwhile, the Sephardic art song repertoire encompasses a diverse range of pieces, from those suitable for beginner singers to more musically sophisticated works intended for highly skilled, advanced singers.

In celebrating the diverse historical contexts and rich blend of cultural influences, Sephardic Art Song exemplifies the beauty of cultural and musical fusion, offering a timeless connection that transcends boundaries and unites people through the universal language of music, and thus, is a treasured addition to the art song repertoire.

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