

LIVING JEWISHLY, SINGING GLOBALLY:

The Origins and Movement of
Moroccan and Persian
Jewish Communities

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סיפורי מוסיקה
STORIES OF MUSIC



INTRODUCTION

This lesson is an exploration and celebration of the very rich music and culture of the Moroccan and Persian Jewish communities. To do this, we present two fictional families — one Moroccan (the Ben-Shabbat family) and one Persian (the Abraimian family) — to represent and exemplify Moroccan and Persian Jewish experience. We hope that in doing so we are also revealing the larger scope and range of Moroccan and Persian Jewish communities, cultures, and experiences. We know that we cannot possibly cover all of this adequately in one lesson.

This lesson was written in conjunction with the Stories of Music Lesson entitled “*Living Jewishly, Singing Globally: Lifecycles and Holidays of Moroccan and Persian Jewish Communities.*” While each of these lessons can stand on its own, we encourage you to consider teaching them both consecutively, beginning with this lesson.

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Avoiding “Exoticization”

We chose to cover more than one community and to do so by presenting two representative (if fictional) families, in order to decrease the risk of “exoticizing” the experience of Moroccan or Persian Jews. Particularly in the United States, most Jewish culture and education has had Ashkenazic culture as its starting point, with other Jewish cultures seemingly, even if benevolently, othered. Our goal in the Stories of Music program is to render all Jewish experience, culture, and music as part of one tapestry: It all belongs to one people and is part of the heritage of all of us.

Because of this, we have offered in some places in this lesson, Ashkenazi musical variations to some songs. We encourage instructors to incorporate at least one of these. This will enable participants to hear the differences in music as well as to tie all Jewish music under one umbrella and lessen the possibility of “exoticizing” the major musical cultures explored here.

Use (and Nonuse) of Language in This Lesson

I. Why We Avoid the Use of the Terms “Sephardic” and “Mizrahi”

This lesson avoids the use of the terms “Sephardic” and “Mizrahi.” The former term comes from the Hebrew word “S’farad,” meaning “Spain,” and indicates Jews whose roots hail from Iberia. Nonetheless, the term has sometimes included Jewish communities whose origins lie elsewhere, especially North African Jews, whose practices have been influenced by Jews with Iberian roots, and to where many Jews from Iberia fled following the Inquisition from Spain (1492) and Portugal (1496). In the United States, where Jewish education has often focused on Ashkenazic communities, the term Sephardic has even been evoked, incorrectly, as a term for any Jewish community that is not Ashkenazic. In Israel historically, “Sephardic” has connoted anyone who is or was part of the Islamic or Arab World, and “Ashkenazi” connoted anyone from Christendom.

The term, for some, thus includes Jews not hailing from Iberia. This has created an overlap of meaning with the term “Mizrahi,” a Hebrew word meaning “Eastern.” This term has often been used to connote Jews whose roots lay in the Middle East, including North Africa. Yet the overlap with the term “Sephardic” is not the only problem. While “Mizrahi” has been used as a designation of an *Edah* (community), the

language about the “Edot HaMizrah,” “the communities of the East,” seems to have arisen from a colonial mindset that presumes some “backwardness” of the “Orient.” Further, today the term “mizrahi” is often used to connote Arab-speaking Jews of Yemen, Tamazight-speaking Jews of Morocco, and Farsi-speaking Jews of Iran. In Israel today the term is used to signify an identity and is interconnected with identity politics in Israel.

Finally, both terms have also been used interchangeably with each other in some circles, even as they continue to exhibit different meanings in other circles. To sum up, the terms “Sephardic” and “Mizrahi” currently signify quite distinct things, depending upon the speaker and the listener. We at Stories of Music have chosen to avoid any confusion in this lesson by not using the terms “Sephardic” or “Mizrahi.” Instead, we speak of Moroccan Jews and Persian Jews. This lesson will demonstrate how even these terms do not connote one group of people with a unified language and culture but, rather, are catchall terms based on geography. Nonetheless, this seems the clearest way to proceed.

[NOTE: For more on the [distinction of these terms](#), see [here](#).]

II. Why We Avoid the Use of the Term “Berber” in This Lesson

We similarly avoid the use of the term “Berber” in this lesson. That term means “gibberish” in Arabic and “barbarian” in Latin. The term apparently originated in an attempt to belittle and vilify the indigenous peoples of North Africa, who number some 25 million. They call themselves Amazigh (singular) or Imazighen (plural). The language of the Imazighen is called Tamazight. The term “Amazigh” in Tamazight means “a free person.” Because the use of “Berber” was meant to demean, we suggest that if class participants use or ask about the term that you politely explain our use. *[NOTE: For more on the use of “Amazigh” vs “Berber,” see [here](#).]*

Timing This Lesson

As always, this Stories of Music lesson is best done over two sessions.

- ◆ **For those completing the lesson over two sessions**, we have marked where the instructor might break, giving bullet points that can help review the first half of the lesson before the break and/or when resuming after the break.
- ◆ **If completing this material in one session**, the instructor will have to decide what material to omit and yet still transmit the essence of the lesson. This can be comfortably done with some preplanning.
- ◆ Alternatively, **if electing to teach this in more than two sessions**, the instructor will need to decide where the breaks will best occur.

How many sessions will be best for your cohort can depend upon many concerns, including but not limited to the length of your session, the number of learners, the number of videos and audios you might include, and if you will be playing all or just part of the videos/audios.

Preparation

I. Amount of Material

In addition to time, this lesson may need more preparation time than a typical lesson, particularly for instructors who lack familiarity with the Moroccan or Persian Jewish cultures. To help assist with this, we

provide more links than usual, in order to provide more biographical, historical, cultural, and linguistic context. The majority of this will serve as helpful background material for the instructor; some of it may be worthy of incorporation into the presentation as well. Because this lesson deals with so many factors that help account for the music of Moroccan and Persian Jewish communities and brings them together coherently, you will want to consider how much of this material to bring to the attention of your cohort, and how to do so. Due to this, we have provided more music than usual, so the instructor will want to consider time management, and may need to make decisions about breadth (presenting excerpts of musical selections) versus depth (presenting all of the musical selections). For this, each instructor will want to gain clarity for themselves regarding goals for their particular cohort.

II. Your Cohort

We Jews have had a wide breadth of lived experience and have lived in many places. Therefore, it is usually a good practice to assume heterogeneity among your cohort. It is quite possible that you have someone in your class who is a Moroccan or Persian Jew, or who is related to Moroccan or Persian Jews through marriage, or has had extensive experience with a Moroccan or Persian Jewish community. If so, think of those people as good resources, and possibly check-in with them on material about which you feel less certain or want more background. Do not make assumptions. For example: Just because most Persian Jews prefer that term over “Iranian Jews,” it is far from universal. Some may use one term in certain situations and the other in others. Depending upon the person, you may want them to speak about their family background, if a particular melody used in the lesson was part of the musical tradition they carry with them, etc.

III. A Tale of Two Families

Finally, we want to be clear that we are framing and introducing Moroccan and Persian Jewish heritages through two fictional families: the Ben-Shabbat family from Morocco and the Abraimian family from Persia. All the specific details about their family are fictional, although representative of Moroccan and Persian families. All other information, such as the artists referred to, specific cultural and religious traditions, et al, are all real.

Enduring Understandings

- ◆ All Jewish communities, including the Moroccan and Persian communities, reflect and refract their sociocultural locations, and react to local historical, economic, and political realities. The music of the Moroccan and Persian Jewish communities exemplifies this.
- ◆ At the same time, all Jewish communities, including the Moroccan and Persian communities, broadly share Jewish religious culture and history, and maintain Jewish values and aspirations.
- ◆ Nonetheless, discrete Jewish communities, including the Moroccan and Persian communities, may express their Judaism through different musical genres, styles, and modes, sometimes adopting local cultural forms, sometimes expressing themselves in local languages in addition to Hebrew, and sometimes developing practices that are not shared by other Jewish communities.
- ◆ The culture of the Moroccan and Persian Jewish communities, including music, practices, food, language, and more, continue to provide personal enrichment for members of those communities.

- ◆ Moroccan and Persian Jewish music today reflects the sociocultural locations in which it is found (often the United States and Israel) and reflects as well an ongoing negotiation, even tension, between honoring the past and thriving in the present.

Essential Questions

- ◆ How do Moroccan and Persian Jewish communities reflect their own separate historical experiences in their music?
- ◆ In what ways do Moroccan and Persian communities exemplify the lives and concerns of all Jewish communities?
- ◆ How have Moroccan and Persian communities, including communities here in the United States, adopted and adapted local culture in expressing their Jewish identity?

Lesson Outline

PART 1: Prelude/Introduction

PART 2: Meet the Ben-Shabbat Family of Los Angeles and Their Favorite Musical Artists

- ◆ Zohra El Fassia (“*Hak a Mama*”)
- ◆ Salim Halali (“*Sidi Habibi*”)
- ◆ Samy El Maghribi (“*Bar Yohai*”)

PART 3: Meet the Aбраimian Family of Long Island and Their Favorite Musical Artists

- ◆ Morteza Khan Neydavoud (“*Bayat Tork*” and “*Bayat Esfahan, Bayat Raje [Homayun]*”)
- ◆ Qamar and Neydavoud (“*Morq-e Sahar*” and “*Shah-e Man Mah-e Man*”)
- ◆ The Jolly Boys (“*La Paloma*,” “*Solamente una Vez*”)
- ◆ Yona Dardashti (“*Bayat Tork*”)

PART 4: Contemporary Music of Moroccan and Persian Jews

(“*Sidi Habibi*,” “*Gol-e Sangam*,” “*Isfahan*,” “*Mama Lhnina*”)

PART 5: Traditions Continue, Renewed

PART 6: Coda/Conclusion (Weaving our learning threads together)

PART 1 — PRELUDE/INTRODUCTION

SLIDE 1

As people are entering play “*Be Man Nagoo Duset Daram*,” “Don’t Tell Me You Love Me.” The beginning features a soloist on the ney, a woodwind instrument. Vocals start at 3:22.

PLAY: “*Be Man Nagoo Duset Daram*” 

The music you heard as you entered was a very popular Persian song, “Don’t Tell Me You Love Me,” that was written (in the 1970’s) and made popular by a Muslim known by his first name [Dariush](#). Here it was sung by a Persian-Jewish Israeli singer and actress named [Liraz Charhi](#), with the [Jerusalem Orchestra East and West](#), which blends musical forms and methods from “the East” and “the West” into a uniform, coherent, and organic language. It embraces musicians from all genders and religions. What an amazing interplay of cultural expression from people of very different backgrounds! It is a great story. We hope that in this lesson we capture essential aspects of the Moroccan Jewish story and of the Persian Jewish story, and how they got to Israel and how they got to the United States. It’s a story of immigration, affectionate memories of the homeland, and how people are resilient and adapt to new circumstances. We’ll do this through the stories of two Jewish families, one Moroccan and one Persian. But let’s begin by thinking about immigration and what it means.





SLIDE 2

[Mary Antin](#) (1881–1949) was one of some 20 million immigrants to the United States, including two million Jews, between 1880 and 1920. Keenly aware of the needs and problems of individuals and communities who relocate, she is best known for her 1912 autobiography, *The Promised Land*.

She writes:

I want now to be of today. It is painful to be conscious of two worlds. The wandering Jew in me seeks forgetfulness.

DISCUSS this quote using any of the following:

-  **What do you think Mary Antin means by this quote?**
-  **In your family history, was there immigration? What do you know about it? Was it “painful to be conscious of two worlds?”**
-  **How can a community “be of today” in the wake of the rupture that immigration entails?**
-  **In what ways is immigration not just about changing location? What other changes might immigration bring in its wake?**

Mary Antin and the majority of Jewish immigrants, were forced by economic conditions, social changes, and antisemitism to leave their point of origin. Today we are going to explore two communities who have similarly had to navigate such terrain. The Jewish communities of Morocco and Persia did not expect the ruptures to their well-entrenched communities that would compel the majority to immigrate. We will mostly explore the communal culture they developed in their homelands in order to expose both

the pain and the possibilities that immigration entails. We will especially highlight the music of each, both before and after their migration. We'll do so through looking at two (fictional) families, one from each community. [**NOTE:** For more on the notion of the "[wandering Jew](#)," see [here](#).]

PART 2 — MEET THE BEN-SHABBAT FAMILY OF LOS ANGELES AND THEIR FAVORITE ARTISTS

SLIDE 3
SLIDE 4

The Ben-Shabbat family, our fictitious family, is in many ways your average, middle-class family living on the westside of Los Angeles. The family traces their lineage on Amir's side (patriarch of the family) for six centuries. As with many Moroccan communities, the Ben-Shabbat family has retained their last name, in some form, throughout that entire time. [**NOTE:** For a brief [history of the Moroccan Jews in Los Angeles](#), see [here](#).]

The Ben-Shabbat family is a fairly typical [Maghrebi](#) Jewish family in terms of their emigration path from Morocco. Two of Amir's brothers and their families left for the nascent State of Israel in 1948, in the aftermath of [anti-Jewish riots](#). One of Amir's sisters had gravitated to France in 1955, before Morocco was granted independence and was still a French protectorate (*for background on French Morocco, see [here](#)*). Yet another sister and brother, immigrated with their families to Montreal, Canada. Amir and Miriam stayed in Morocco much later to tend to his aging father and immigrated to Israel only in 1963. As did many other Moroccan and Israeli families, the Ben-Shabbats relocated to Los Angeles, CA after the Yom Kippur War in 1973. This was part of a larger pattern of migration that would, once again, reshape the global Jewish geography.

Pair Share

- ?** The Ben Shabbat family moved from Morocco, to Israel, to the United States. How much movement have your own personal families had, and how has that affected you and your Jewish identity?

Group Discussion

- ?** Moroccan families typically have branches living all over the world as a result of these unique immigration patterns. What effects do you think that has on the cultural practices of the community?

As we get to know the Ben-Shabbat family, we shall see that they demonstrate the diasporic nature of Moroccan Jews, which includes the incorporation of several languages (Tamazight, French, Spanish, Portuguese, Arabic, modern Hebrew), communal practices, foodways, and more, leading to an incredibly diverse culture.


Amir's family lived in Casablanca, a large city and Jewish center. As Morocco's main Atlantic seaport, it has served as a hub for various cultural communities. While a Jewish presence was established in Casablanca in the mid-nineteenth century, it came of age in the early twentieth century, particularly after Casablanca became the economic center of Morocco in 1912, about the time that Morocco was divided into French and Spanish protectorates. [**NOTE:** For more on the background of the [Jews of Casablanca](#), see [here](#).]

From very early on, Amir’s family enjoyed listening to the popular music of the era. Morocco had already developed a rich musical heritage, incorporating indigenous music (such as from Amazigh communities) as well as what immigrants over generations brought (such as Andalusian music). Exciting new performers started to emerge, including women. Among Amir and Miriam’s favorites was the incomparable Zohra El Fassia. Imagine Amir and Miriam taking in the vibrant scene at their local cabaret.

PLAY: [“Hak a Mama”](#) 


- ◆ “Hak A Mama” is a Judeo-Moroccan folk song that has its roots in the crucible of Moroccan music, in the *malhoun* genre, which incorporates long poems. [**NOTE:** For more background on [malhoun music](#), see [here](#).]
- ◆ The protagonist of the song evokes her jealousy to another woman, her pain to her lover, and her hopes to Moulay Ibrahim (d. 1661), a well-known Sufi figure.
- ◆ El Fassia records this in a traditional way, alternating vocal and musical sections.
- ◆ While it’s unclear when this audio was taken, it was first recorded in the 1920’s by El Fassia.
- ◆ “Hak a Mama” was sung originally by the Jewish communities of the Tafilalt region, an area rich in the history of cohabitation and coexistence by Jewish, Amazigh, and Arab peoples. [**NOTE:** For more on [the Jews of Tafilalt](#), see [here](#).]


Pair Share

-  Please take 30 seconds to write down three words you would use to describe this music. What specific element(s) led you to select those words — the melody, the tempo, the instrumentation, some other element?

[**NOTE:** Afterwards, the instructor may wish to ask class participants to choose one of their partner’s three words that resonated with them and explain why. This could be done as a Discussion in the larger group or as an additional piece of the Pair Share. If done as a discussion, the Instructor may have time for only 2–3 responses.]

- ◆ Born in the city of Sefrou, El Fassia was the daughter of a butcher and hazzan. They moved to Fez when Zohra was young. Around age 13, she was married, had her first child and began pursuing her career. She not only performed religious songs at synagogue, but also performed at coffee houses and cabarets. [**NOTE:** Jews had settled in Sefrou after the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 C.E. The city, known as “Little Jerusalem,” was named for the Ahl Sefrou, an Amazigh tribe that converted to Judaism in the second century. For background on [the Jews of Sefrou](#), see [here](#).]
- ◆ El Fassia became a star and emerged as a central figure in the burgeoning recording industry of colonial Maghreb in the early twentieth century. [**NOTE:** She was born Zohra Hamou. “El Fassia” is an honorific meaning “The woman from Fez.”]
- ◆ Beginning in the 1930s, El Fassia released dozens of 78 rpm records with prominent international labels such as Pathé, Philips, and Polyphon. Among the first generations of singers to record in North Africa, she was at one point deemed “the most renowned of Moroccan female vocalists.” [**NOTE:** Source of quote: Mahieddine Bachtarzi, artistic director for Gramophone, quoted in Silver, Christopher Benno, “Jews, Music-Making, and the Twentieth Century Maghrib,” 2017, p. 61, n. 158.] She recorded 17 albums from 1947–1957.

- ◆ She became the “queen” of *malhoun*, long-form colloquial poems set to music, narrating stories of politics and history, beauty and heartbreak. Some songs were written by poets especially for her; others she wrote herself.
- ◆ In addition, El Fassia mastered the *gharnati* style, an Algerian form of music that adapted the Andalusian style. The name *gharnati* is from the Arabic name for Granada. In Morocco, *gharnati* music is especially associated with the city of Oujda (on the Algerian border) and Rabat, capital of Morocco. [**NOTE:** For more on [gharnati music](#), see [here](#).]
- ◆ She was part of a cohort of high-profile Jewish musicians across North Africa who attained widespread mainstream success. This was, ironically, at a time when the social fabric of Jewish life in Morocco was beginning to break apart in response to a host of social and political transformations that included Zionism and the displacement of Palestinians in the formation of the Israeli state in 1948, as well as growing anti-colonial Arab nationalism.
- ◆ El Fassia sang frequently at the royal palace of Sidi Mohammed ben Yusef, first Sultan, then [King Mohammed V of Morocco](#), whom she adored. As historian Chris Silver notes, her rendition circa 1954–55 of the song “[Ayli Ayli Hbibbi Diali](#)” (“My Love”),  was recorded within the widespread longing for the return of the then-exiled Sultan to his country. [**NOTE:** [King Mohammed V was seen as protecting Morocco’s Jews, during the Shoah and beyond](#). Some 75,000 Moroccan Jews publicly mourned his death in 1961.]
- ◆ Between 1962–64, El Fassia immigrated to Israel, joining her sister and family who had been living in Jerusalem since 1917. Over 200,000 Jews left Morocco between 1948 and 1967, relocating in Israel, France, and North America.
- ◆ In the 1960s, El Fassia, together with her third partner Moise (Moshe) Cohen, settled in the southern coastal town of Ashkelon, which even today has a significant population of Moroccan Jews.

OPTIONAL EXTRA: Here is a [video of Zohra](#)  performing a love song in her later years called “*Sa’adi Rit Albarach*.” She is accompanied by a musician playing an [oud](#). [[For more on Moroccan musical instruments, see here](#). [For more on Moroccan music in general, see here](#).]



Salim Halali (1920–2005)

SLIDE 6

In Casablanca, Amir and Miriam saved up money so they could attend an occasional evening at Le Coq D’or, the famous, fabulous night club run by Salim Halali that showcased North African Andalusian music generally and Moroccan performers specifically.

- ◆ Salim Halali was a gay Algerian-born singer of North African-Andalusian music, as well as popular music, in France and later Morocco. (*Recall that Zohra El-Fassia mastered gharnati music, which came from Algeria.*)
- ◆ Born in [Bône](#) in 1920, Halali’s mother was [Judeo-Amazigh](#).
- ◆ He stowed away on a ship to France in 1934, and became a successful singer in Paris’ flamenco clubs, singing in both French and Arabic.
- ◆ He toured Europe, and his songs became popular in North Africa.

- ◆ During WWII, he was saved by the founder and rector of the Grand Mosque of Paris, Si Kaddour Benghabrit, who gave him false Muslim identity papers and engraved Halali's father's name on an unmarked grave in the Muslim cemetery. [*Benghabrit saved over 100 Jews. [Here is a video about this story.](#)*] Afterward, he hired Halali to perform at the mosque's Moorish Cafe.
- ◆ Halali opened two cafes in Paris and, later, moved to Casablanca, where he established the prestigious cabaret, Le Coq D'Or, one of the great centers of nightlife and music, where the country's well-to-do and international celebrities, such as Egypt's King Farouk, would come. This is where Amir and Miriam enjoyed an occasional wonderful night out in Casablanca!
- ◆ Although a fire completely destroyed the cabaret in 1965, its significance and legacy of Le Coq D'Or was such that it has a [Facebook presence](#) today, where those who attended continue to share memories. Here Halali was able to promote and disseminate Moroccan music, including Jewish music, as well as help cross-pollinate musical forms from throughout North Africa.

PLAY: "Sidi Habibi," either the audio of [El-Fassia](#)  singing and/or the audio of [Salim Halali](#) singing.  The song was written by Halali, and expresses yearning for a lover. At the same time, the song honors King Mohammed V, considered the beloved.

Discussion: It is interesting to note how Jewish artists could hold positions of high esteem among the top echelons of the arts world while also being oppressed by that society. Halali was a music pioneer, yet as a Jew and a gay man, had to contend with societal disapprobation.

 **Do you see any parallels in American history/culture?**

EXTENSION IDEA: [Cantor Samy El Maghribi](#) (1922–2008)


SLIDE 7

- ◆ Salomon Amzallag was born in [Safi](#), Morocco. He was born on the seventh day of Passover, the day Jewish tradition assigns to the crossing of the Sea and the spontaneous outpouring of song. At his circumcision, *shikhat*, women singers hummed songs by his crib. El Maghribi always thought he was destined to do something in music.
- ◆ At age 7, he made himself a mandolin and taught himself to play the oud. He deepened his musical gifts at the Casablanca Music Conservatory.
- ◆ His first recorded hit came in 1948 with "Loukane Elmlayin" ("Ah, If I Was a Millionaire").
- ◆ In 1950, he formed his band, Samy's Boys.
- ◆ His music integrated Judeo-Moroccan and Andalusian musical heritages. He mastered — and combined — four genres: ancient Moroccan song, modern Moroccan song, classical Andalusian singing, and liturgical chanting. He thus united sacred and secular, tradition and modernity, and Muslims and Jews.
- ◆ He emigrated to Montreal, Canada in 1960 (where there was a community of Moroccan Jewish emigres). In 1967, he became the first cantor of Shearith Israel, a Spanish-Portuguese synagogue, and officiated there for 16 years.

- ◆ He made aliyah in 1984. In Ashdod he created the Merkaz Piyyut Veshira (Center of Liturgical Poetry and Song) and served as its educational director. There he conducted a choir of students which later evolved into the Israeli Andalusian Orchestra.
- ◆ In 1996, he returned to Montreal but continued touring around the world.
- ◆ He taught Sephardi liturgy at Yeshiva University.

MUSIC: “Bar Yohai”

- ◆ “Bar Yohai” is a kabbalistic piyyut honoring [Rabbi Shimon bar Yohai](#), the second century C.E. sage and eminent disciple of Rabbi Akiva who was active following the destruction of the Temple in 70 C.E. Tradition ascribes to him the authorship of [the Zohar](#), the central work of Kabbalah.
- ◆ “Bar Yohai” was composed by [Shimon ibn Lavi](#) (1486–1585), who following the expulsion from Spain lived in Fez, Morocco. He wrote a commentary on the Zohar, entitled *Ketem Paz*, and a dictionary of difficult terms in the Zohar.
- ◆ The hymn consists of 10 stanzas, one for each of the [10 sefirot of Kabbalah](#). The first nine stanzas also spell out the author’s name.
- ◆ The hymn is sung universally on [Lag B’Omer](#), the reputed anniversary of Rabbi Shimon bar Yohai’s death. Many communities sing it on Friday night, either during Kabbalat Shabbat, before beginning Shabbat dinner, or at the Shabbat dinner table.

PLAY: “Bar Yohai” 

We have just been introduced to the Ben Shabbat family. We read of their family’s journey to Los Angeles from Morocco via Israel. We learned and heard about Zohra El Fassia, whose career took off when she moved to Casablanca. Casablanca was also the site of Le Coq d’Or, the famous cabaret founded and operated by openly gay singer Salim Halili, of Judeo-Amazigh background.

Pair Share

- ◆  **What is something that you have gleaned or gained from learning of the experience of the Ben Shabbat family?**

PART 3 — MEET THE ABRAIMIAN FAMILY OF LONG ISLAND

SLIDE 8

We will now continue our learning journey with another family, the Abraimians originally from Persia. Similar to the Ben-Shabbats, the Abraimians were eventually pushed by social, political, and economic forces to the point of abandoning their historic homeland to seek a new, safer, and a more prosperous life. Like the Ben-Shabbats, we will see how various aspects of their culture traveled and evolved with them, continuing to grow in richness, depth, and beauty.

SLIDE 9

The Abraimian family is a well-to-do family living in Kings Point, a village on the Great Neck peninsula of Long Island, New York. Musa and Esther have three grown children: Itzach, Abbas, Danyal. Great Neck has over 40,000 Jews, mostly Iranian, over 20 synagogues, two kosher supermarkets, a kosher butcher shop, more than a dozen kosher food establishments, and three mikvahs. *[NOTE: For more on this New York enclave of Persian Jews, see here.]*

Esther's family lived in Persia before it was Persia, beginning when Jews were exiled there in the wake of the destruction of the Second Temple.

SLIDE 10

Musa is from Tehran, but his maternal family hails from Isfahan, which was known even to Arab and Persian cartographers as *al-Yahudiyya*, "the city of Jews." *[NOTE: On the rich history of the Jews of Isfahan, see here.]*

Musa remembers that his grandmother Sara spoke Judeo-Isfahani, in addition to Farsi. *[NOTE: Judeo-Isfahani is quite distinct from Farsi (standard Persian). It is a subgroup of Judeo-Median, which is among the Central Plateau dialects of Iran. For more on the moribund Judeo-Median languages, see here. For an even broader view of Judeo-Iranian languages, see here.]*

Musa used to visit Isfahan as a child, especially when his family would make a pilgrimage to the family graves in nearby Pir Bakran, which is also revered as the site of the grave of the healer Serah bat Asher, depicted in Genesis 46:17 as the granddaughter of the biblical Jacob, where a marker indicates her death in 1133. *[NOTE: For more on the phenomenon of Serah bat Asher, her "immortality," her burial site, and her legacy, see here.]* Musa's maternal family moved to Tehran when Sara was just a teenager.

Group Discussion

Many Jewish communities go on pilgrimages to important sites outside the state of Israel, quite often the resting places of revered figures.

- ❓ With which sites are you familiar? *[NOTE: For a list of 100 such sites, see here.]*
- ❓ Are there sites you've visited in America which you believe are important for other Americans to visit in their lifetime (e.g. the White House, Mt. Rushmore, the Alamo)?
- ❓ Are there other sites that, as a Jew, you feel that other Jewish Americans should visit in their lifetime (e.g. Museum of Tolerance or some other Holocaust museum/center; site of the lynching of Leo Frank; deportation site of Japanese-Americans to detention camps)?
- ❓ How do you think having Jewish holy sites in your home country affects your relationship with Judaism? With your home country?
- ❓ How does this discussion affect how you understand the pilgrimage made to the burial site of Serah bat Asher?

SLIDE 11

Some of Musa and Esther's family left Iran for Israel in the years following Israel becoming a state, when some antisemitism was exhibited. *[NOTE: Instructor might recall how Zohra El Fassia's star rose ironically at the time that the social fabric of Jewish life was breaking down, with the establishment of Israel as one factor.]*

However, Musa and Esther, along with many Persian Jews, remained in Persia, because of their loyalty to the Pahlavi dynasty (1925–1979). Reza Shah, the dynasty's founder in 1925, consolidated the gains of the [Iranian Constitutional Revolution](#) (1906–1915). He eased restrictions on minorities, including new areas of employment and assured their safety. Musa and Esther's lives improved, as did the lives of their family, friends, and, indeed, the entire Jewish community (resulting, for example, in the country's first [Jewish newspaper *Shalom*](#)). This is why the Jews were devastated by the [fall of the Shah in 1979](#), and they (along with so many Persian Jews) left in its aftermath.

All of this helps to explain why many (but by no means all) Persian Jews refer to themselves as Persian Jews rather than as Iranian Jews to highlight their ethnicity (and languages of origin) over allegiance to any particular political regime (particularly the governments that have succeeded the Pahlavi dynasty [1925–1979]).

Morteza Khan Neydavoud (1900–1990):

SLIDE 12

From very early on, Musa's family enjoyed listening to the popular music of the era. Among their favorite performers was Morteza Neydavoud.

- ♦ Son of master tombak player Bala Khan, Neydavoud is arguably the most renowned Jewish master of Persian classical music, and indeed one of twentieth-century Iran's leading musicians. *[NOTE: A tombak is a Persian goblet drum. For a brief introduction to some [Persian musical instruments](#), see [here](#).]*
- ♦ Neydavoud was a master tar player, and among the very few Persian master musicians to have created a style of tar-playing so distinct that it bears his name. *[NOTE: A tar is a long-necked, double-bowl chordophone of the lute family. For more on [the tar](#), see [here](#).]*

Neydavoud and Qamar

SLIDE 13

- ♦ Neydavoud discovered and nurtured other musicians and performers, particularly women. Among the legendary female figures Neydavoud regularly worked with was the pioneering mezzo-soprano [Qamar \(Qamar-ol-Moluk Vaziri, 1905–1959\)](#), known as “the Queen of Persian music.”
- ♦ Orphaned as an infant, Qamar, a muslima, was raised by her grandmother, who had been a *rowzeh-khân* (mourning performer) at the court of [Naser al-Din Shah Qajar](#). *[NOTE: One might note the reference to m'kon'not, women mourning performers in Jeremiah 9:16.]*
- ♦ At age 16 Qamar met and began studying under Neydavoud. He organized her first concert at the Grand Hotel in Tehran, where she appeared on stage with men without a veil, nearly 12 years before the official unveiling of women by Reza Shah in 1936. She was arrested but continued to perform without a veil. *[To see how the control of veiling has and continues to affect Iranian politics, see [here](#). To see how veiling affects Iranian women's identity, see [here](#).]*

Pair Share

- ❓ What might it have been like for an older Jewish man to take a 13-year old Muslim girl under his wing to tutor her and nurture her career? What might have been some reactions of the public (or not)?

Discussion:

- ❓ Qamar performed without a veil. What does the wearing of a powerful symbol (e.g. veil, kippah, Star of David) mean for the performer who wears it? What meanings might different members of the public ascribe to it?
- ❓ How might the wearing of a symbol affect the music itself?

SLIDE 14

- ◆ From 1926 until the end of their artistic collaboration some 30 years later, Neydavoud and Qamar would not only appear together, but become the most recorded artists of their time, producing over one hundred albums for His Master’s Voice and Polyphon Records.
- ◆ Neydavoud often performed with Qamar on Radio Tehran’s weekly musical program, beginning in 1941 and accompanied Qamar at her farewell performance in 1956.
- ◆ Qamar became revered for her mastery of radif, the repertoire of Persian vocal music, and for her rendition of both tasnif (a composed song in a slow meter, with lyrics often gleaned from Persian classical poets such as Rumi, 1207–1273, or Hafez, 1325–1390) and tarana (a Hindustani vocal form using Persian and Arabic forms). [**NOTE:** For more on the interaction of Persian and Indian music, [see here.](#)]

MUSIC: “Morq-e Sahar”

- ◆ “Morq-e Sahar” (“The Bird of Dawn”) is a tasnif written by Neydavoud and set to lyrics by Mohammad-Taqi Bahar (1886–1951) in the early 20th century under the influence of the Iranian Constitutional Revolution.
- ◆ The poetry portrays the speaker as trapped in a birdcage, yearning to be free.
- ◆ Written while Bahar was in prison, the song uses this imagery to raise political and social issues. The song is widely regarded as “the Unofficial National Anthem of Iranian Freedom.”
- ◆ Neydavoud’s 1927 “Morq-e sahar” (“The Bird of Dawn”) is one of the most famous Persian songs.
- ◆ This is an early recording by Qamar.

PLAY: [“Morq-e Sahar”](#) 

Discussion:

- ❓ What kind of music is “Morq-e Sahar”?
- ❓ What kind of freedom(s) does “Morq-e Sahar” evoke for you?
- ❓ “Morq-e Sahar” is considered a “second anthem” of sorts for Persians. The dictionary defines anthem as “a song, as of praise, devotion, or patriotism.” Is there a song that would be considered a “second anthem” for you as an American (after “The Star-Spangled Banner”) or as a Jew (after “Hatikvah”)?

Another Classic with Qamar and Neydavoud

PLAY [“Shah-e Man Mah-e Man”](#) 

- ◆ “Shah-e Man Mah-e Man” is a classic song composed by Neydavoud, originally performed without vocals and done within the Persian classical music tradition.
- ◆ “Shah-e Man Mah-e Man,” (“My King, My Moon”) has a woman speaker, expressing her yearnings, yet it is, like many of Pejman’s poems, laden with a deep sense of loss, even remorse: “I have an eternal fire in my chest/My existence is death, named life.”
- ◆ Here Neydavoud accompanies Qamar on the tar. Neydavoud’s brother Musa accompanies on the violin.
- ◆ The lyrics are by [Hosayn Pejman Bakhtiari](#) (1900–1974), a renowned poet and lyricist.

Reaction:

Ask participants to give three words in reaction to hearing this music. If via Zoom, participants can place this in the chat. If live, take several reactions.


Summary

Our time for this session is running out. When we return next time, we’ll talk about Neydavoud’s accomplishments as a composer.

[NOTE: The instructor should catalog responses to the following in a place where all can see, and then add to those responses from the following bullet points, particularly when it was a focus of the instructor. If time is a factor, the instructor might simply ask, “What have we learned today?” However, if time, asking these different kinds of questions may open up more reactions. Instructor may wish to have students take a few minutes to write down their thoughts before having students offer responses.]

Let’s take a few moments to reflect.

 **What is something you have learned today about Moroccan or Persian Jewish experience?**

 **What is something you have learned about the role of music in Jewish society in Morocco or Persia?**

 **What is something you have learned about music and identity?**

 **What is something you have learned about how music challenges boundaries?**

- ◆ The Moroccan and Persian Jewish communities came to the United States because of ruptures to Jewish life in their homelands, where they had lived for centuries.
- ◆ The journeys of the Moroccan and Persian Jewish communities to the United States were often not direct, but involved living in other countries, including Israel.
- ◆ Zohra El Fassia is one of the most revered singers in Moroccan history, and was considered “the queen of *malhoun* music” and a master of the *gharnati* style.
- ◆ Salim Halili was a renowned cabaret artist, who is also known for opening and operating *Le Coq D’Or*, the famed nightclub in Casablanca. A queer Jewish artist, Halili made friendships even in the religious Muslim community, and earned the admiration of all.

- ◆ Morteza Neydavoud was a renowned Persian musician and composer. A master tar player, he also nurtured the careers of a number of women artists, especially Qamar, whom he taught, organized her concerts, and accompanied her.
- ◆ The Moroccan and Persian communities, like all communities, reflect their sociocultural historical, economic, and political realities, and this is reflected in their music. This remains true for the Moroccan and Persian Jewish communities in the United States today.
- ◆ At the same time, the Moroccan and Persian communities share Jewish religious culture and history, and maintain Jewish values and aspirations with all Jewish communities.
- ◆ The culture of the Moroccan and Persian Jewish communities, including music, practices, food, language, and more, continue to provide personal enrichment for members of those communities.
- ◆ Moroccan and Persian Jewish music today reflects the sociocultural locations in which it is found (often the United States and Israel) and reflects as well an ongoing negotiation, even tension, between honoring the past and thriving in the present.

OUTRO:**SLIDE 15**

If you recall, the video playing as you entered was of a Persian-Jewish singer, Liraz Charhi, singing a secular song by a popular Persian-Muslim artist, Dariush. It shows how music can transcend boundaries, including those of religion.

As we leave, we show the point in the opposite direction. We present Neydavoud's composition, "*Shah-e Man Mah-e Man*," which made Qamar famous. Now we present a newer version of that classic by [Tara Tiba](#) (b. 1984) an Iranian artist who fuses Persian traditional music with jazz, Latin, contemporary, and experimental settings. In order to sing in public she moved to Australia. In having an Australian-Muslim artist of Iranian descent resurrect a classic song by a Persian Jew of a previous generation, we not only take in how much the musical cultures of Persian (and Moroccan) Jews have touched and affected the musical choices and compositions of other cultures, but we again note how music knows no boundaries, and how peoples seem to be at their best when they display curiosity about and find friendships among the peoples of the world.

PLAY: "[Shah-e Man Mah-e Man](#)" 

BREAK

NEYDAVOUD as COMPOSER

Welcome Back!

Last session, we explored some of the journeys of both Moroccan and Persian Jews. We explored how Zohra El Fassia broke tremendous ground in the North African musical world with her mastery of *malhoun* music and *gharnati* style. We saw how Salim Halili made his mark within that same world not only through his singing but through operating one of the most important venues for cabaret music, *Le Coq d’Or*, in Casablanca. We saw how Neydavoud, a master tar player, also nurtured and supported the entire career of Qamar, the “queen of Persian music.”

The music you heard/saw as you entered was “Prelude to Esfahan” by Neydavoud. It originally was performed without words. Yet early on, poetry was put to the music, and it became “*Shah-e Man Mah-e Man*,” made more famous by Qamar. We heard modern Iranian-Australian singer Tara Tiba giving it a jazzy feel as we left last week. But it highlights the endurance of Neydavoud’s compositions. So today we begin by focusing on his legacy as a composer.

- ◆ Neydavoud was considered an exceptionally gifted composer in a variety of classical Persian musical forms, including the *tasnif*. [**NOTE:** For an introduction to Persian music, [see here](#).]
- ◆ Neydavoud was one of the pioneers in the compositional rearrangement of the traditional *radif* (basic traditional collection of melodies). [**NOTE:** For more on the *radif*, [see here](#).] Indeed, he developed his own signature version of the traditional *radif*, known as the Neydavoud *radif*. Beginning in 1969, it was recorded in its entirety over an eighteen-month period with Neydavoud himself on tar. His payment for this effort? He received one copy of the entire set of recordings, which he later donated to Hebrew University in Jerusalem (the only other set is in Iran).
- ◆ Neydavoud is regarded as a major figure in the development of Persian classical music. Virtually all composers and performers after him emulated him.
- ◆ He left Iran shortly after the revolution in 1979, and spent the remainder of his life in Los Angeles. His final public performance was in 1984.

MUSIC: “*Bayat Tork*” and “*Bayat Esfahan, Bayat Raje (Homayun)*”

Persian art music does not focus on “songs” in the modern Western sense. Rather, the music consists of *dastgāhs*, or music “patterns” which incorporate a scale, a motif, a group of short pieces, and a recognizable identity. A musical piece within the *dastgāh* is called a *gusa*. [**NOTE:** For more on the *dastgāh* system and the *gusa*, [see here](#).] We might loosely — very loosely — think of Western art music, where we also do not think of “songs,” but of symphonies containing movements, each of which might have motifs, etc.

Here we present two selections, each from a *gusa*.

The first is a snippet (0:44) of a late performance by Neydavoud playing tar. “*Bayat Tork*” is a musical system of one particular *dastgāh* called Sur. The term “Tork” means “Turkic” and refers to the Qashqai people of southern Iran. Many Qashqai songs are composed in this mode. [For more on the [Qashqai people](#), see here.]

PLAY: “[Bayat Tork](#)” 



For contrast, the next selection is a 1926 audio of Neydavoud. [We suggest playing from 0:00–0:59.] Once you have seen him, you can try to imagine him in his youth playing the second piece with Musa and Esther in the audience, quietly humming along. Bayat Esfahan is a musical system within the *dastgāh* called Homayun. Bayat Raje is a *gusa* within the Bayat Esfahan system. [For more on *Bayat Esfahan* and *Bayat Raje*, see here.]

PLAY: “[Bayat Esfahan, Bayat Raje \(Homayun\)](#)” 

The Polish-Jewish Dance Band that got STUCK (Or Survived) in Tehran SLIDE 17

While in Iran, in 1939 the Abraimians went to a cabaret where they encountered a Polish-Jewish dance band that was visiting Tehran. The Jolly Boys, including Stanislaw Sperber, Sonia Vartanian, Ghanbary F. Socolow, and Igo Krischer, were hired to play at the wedding of the future Shah, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. Unfortunately, their return to Poland was hampered by the invasion of both the Soviet army and the Wehrmacht (Germany’s armed forces in WWII) in what would be some of the opening battles of the Eastern Front of WWII.

While in Tehran the Jolly Boys did not make any commercial recordings, but they did continue to perform — and remain safe. Musa and Esther loved the performance! These two recordings of the Jolly Boys (during their time in Tehran) were discovered, featuring the singer on classic songs translated into Persian. [NOTE: For more on the Jolly Boys, click here]

PLAY: [Kabootar \(Khatibi\) "La Paloma" by Sebastian de Iradier \(c. 1860\)](#)  or [Yasseman \(Fakoor\) "Solamente una vez" by Agustin Lara \(1941\)](#) 

- ◆ “*La Paloma*” is the most widely recorded Spanish song, and, with well over 1,000 versions, one of the most widely recorded and best known songs ever.
- ◆ This song seems to have a Persian backdrop. It harks back to an episode that occurred in 492 BCE. The Persian fleet was caught in a storm and wrecked off the shore of Mount Athos. The Greeks observed white doves (then unknown in Europe) escaping from the sinking Persian ships. Those were most probably homing pigeons which the Persian fleet carried with them when sallying forth out of Persia for battle. This inspired the notion that such birds bring home a final message of love from a sailor who is lost at sea.
- ◆ Recall that The Jolly Boys were finding sanctuary in Tehran. This choice of song may be related that they hoped a paloma, a dove, would bring them good news of loved ones in Europe.
- ◆ “*Solamente una Vez*” is a bolero (romantic ballad given highly emotive performance)
- ◆ The song is known in English as “You Belong in My Heart.”
- ◆ This song choice, too, may well have been special meaning to the Jolly Boys separated for years from loved ones due to WWII.

Discussion:

The case of the Jolly Boys shows a group of Ashkenazic Jewish performers living in a Persian environment, playing Spanish and Mexican music, but singing in Farsi.

- ❓ How might Musa and Esther have been affected by the Jolly Boys' performance?
- ❓ How might the Jolly Boys' presence in Iran have affected the music of Persian Jews?
- ❓ How might the Jolly Boys' experience in Iran affected how they approached, wrote, and performed music after the war?

Pair Share:

- ❓ When have you had an unexpected multicultural experience?

The example of the Jolly Boys traveling to Iran and sustaining themselves there demonstrates just how wide the musical palette was in Iran. We might see, then, that Persian Jewish music (and Middle Eastern music in general) exhibits a broad range of styles. We also learn that oftentimes the possibilities for social and cultural change, including our musical expression, are heightened by the opportunity to connect with people from other socio-cultural milieus.

EXTENSION IDEA: Hazzan Yona Dardashti (1903–93)

SLIDE 18

Another favorite artist of the Abraimians, as well as many Persians around the world, was Cantor Yona Dardashti. All members of the Abraimian family were both fans of Dardashti, but also felt great pride in knowing that one of their country's greatest musicians was a fellow Jew. Their fandom continued as the family's path mirrored Dardashti's move to Israel, and they excitedly joined the Shushan HaBirah Synagogue for Persian immigrants which he helped found and served as *Hazzan*.

- ◆ Son of a hazzan, Yona Dardashti is the only Jewish vocalist in recorded Persian classical music history to have received wide national acclaim as a master vocalist. Dardashti was known for his powerful voice, high range, and use of *tahrir* (see below).
- ◆ In 1947 Dardashti began singing with the Iranian National Radio Orchestra. He performed on the radio weekly for nearly nineteen years.
- ◆ Despite his numerous concerts and live radio performances, very few recordings were ever made of Dardashti's voice, and even fewer have survived.
- ◆ Dardashti moved to Rishon LeZion, Israel in 1967. He died there of cancer in 1993 and is buried in Jerusalem.
- ◆ Back in Tehran in the mid-1970s, Dardashti recorded selections of liturgical music including the *Patakh Eliahu* (an important kabbalistic text, attributed to the prophet Elijah, recited daily in many communities before formal morning prayers) and fragments of Selichot (penitential) prayers, which were re-released in Los Angeles in the mid-1980s.

PLAY: [“Bayat Tork,”](#) performed by Yona Dardashti 

Please see above under Morteza Neydavoud for notes on this.

One might note, particularly in the latter part of this recording, that Yona Dardashti employs the Persian vocal technique called *tahrir*, voice crackling. It is often described as an “ornament” of the melodic line which consists in producing one or more short frequency jumps — called *tekye* — towards higher pitches. **[NOTE:** *We will point out tahrir again in the Stories of Music Lesson “Living Jewishly, Singing Globally: Lifecycles and Holidays of Moroccan and Persian Jewish Communities. For more on tahrir, see here. One can find an [electroglottographic analysis of tahrir here.](#)]*

PART 4 — CONTEMPORARY MUSIC OF MOROCCAN AND PERSIAN JEWS

SLIDE 19

The Ben Shabbat and Abraimian Families have acculturated somewhat to their American surroundings, but they continue to enjoy listening to modern Moroccan and Persian musicians and music.

SLIDE 20

We next listen to a sampling of this music. **[NOTE:** *The following selections (all 2006 or more recent) alternate between Moroccan and Persian selections. If time is a consideration, the instructor should still play one Moroccan selection and one Persian selection from among the following. If the instructor wishes, they can stop after every selection or every two selections to get reactions, either in the chat (if by Zoom) or ask people the first three words that come to mind, or some similar activity that would not necessarily be lengthy, but give some thoughtfulness to what the cohort has heard.]*

PLAY: [“Sidi Habibi”](#) [Should play 0:00–2:00] 

This is the classic by Salim Halili that we played earlier in the lesson (either the audio by Salim Halili himself or the audio by Zohra El Fassia). It is performed here in a 2021 outdoor concert by [Laura Elkeslassy](#) (b. 1985), a French native of Maghrebi descent. She is now based in Brooklyn, New York. Her album, *Ya Ghorbati: Divas in Exile*, was inspired by her Moroccan Jewish heritage and history. Her efforts try to reclaim the Moroccan Jewish liturgical traditions and North African musical heritage from a feminist standpoint.

PLAY [“Gol-e Sangam”](#) 

This famous Persian song (“My Stone Flower”) by Iranian classical pianist and composer Anoushiravan Ruhani (b. 1939) and poet, lyricist, and tar player Bijan Samandar (1941–2019) was written prior to the 1979 Revolution. It concerns someone in love facing rejection from the beloved. The chorus proclaims: *“I am a stone flower/I am a stone flower/what to say for my longing heart/like the sun/if you don't shine on me/I am cold and colorless.”* This captures the feelings of Persian Jews in the wake of the 1979 fall of the Shah — they were in love with Persia but felt rejected by their homeland since.

Here “*Gol-e Sangam*” is sung by [Maureen Nehedar](#), backed by the [Raana Symphonette Orchestra](#) in 2010. Nehedar’s family left Isfahan for Israel in 1980, shortly, following the fall of the shah in 1979, when she was two-years old. She received training in European classical music, but joined the [Ensemble Esfahan](#) at the age of 17, performing both classical Persian music and Persian folk songs. Her album, *Asleep in the Bosom of My Childhood* is a collection of Persian Jewish piyyutim. Her follow-up album, recorded in Farsi, was *Gole Gandum*, a collection of Persian folk songs as well as pre-revolution era popular songs, an era remembered with affection by Persian Jews.

PLAY: “[Isfahan](#)” [For time, play 0:00–3:47] 

SLIDE 21

[Tania Eshaghoff-Friedberg](#) (b. 1974) is a New York city-based classical pianist and composer from Tehran. In Persia, she was inspired by the improvisational style of Persian folk melodies. Her album *Road to Tehran — Journey Home* (2006) is a synthesis of Persian folk and Western classical styles. “*Isfahan*” is an original composition.

PLAY: “[Mama Lhnina](#)” 

This classic is performed here by Israeli singer [Neta Elkayam](#) in an “unplugged” version (2021). Elkayam, of Moroccan descent, creates music and art inspired by Jewish artists of North Africa. She integrates Andalusian, Amazigh and Mediterranean influences, rock, pop and jazz. Here she performs a song made famous by the recording of the noted Moroccan-Israeli singer, [Cantor Jo Amar](#) (1930–2009). She is accompanied by her husband, [Amit Hai Cohen](#), a musician, composer, and filmmaker of Moroccan descent.

PART 5 — TRADITIONS CONTINUE, RENEWED

SLIDE 22

The musical traditions of the Moroccan and Persian communities are being passed on to and forwarded by a new generation of Moroccan and Persian Jewish artists. In the tradition of “*chadesh yameinu*,” (“renewing our days”), these newer leaders might be considered teacher-artists, who have absorbed the inherited cultural and religious traditions, and now rendering them in musical ways that can speak more directly and powerfully to a new generation.

Dr. Samuel Torjman Thomas

SLIDE 23

Among these leaders is Dr. Samuel Torjman Thomas.

- ◆ Dr. Torjman Thomas serves as Assistant Professor of Music at both John Jay College and Montclair State University, Assistant Professor of Classical and Oriental Studies at CUNY-Hunter College, and Director of Curriculum and Institutional Programming at Brooklyn Music School.
- ◆ He is also artistic director and bandleader of AsefaMusic and the New York Andalus Ensemble (and has recorded several albums in this capacity).
- ◆ He researches and performs North African, Middle Eastern, and jazz traditions, and has published in the fields of ethnomusicology, religious studies, Jewish studies, and diaspora studies.
- ◆ He has mentored numerous students.

MUSIC: “Habibi Yah Habibi”

- ◆ The song is by [Asher Mizrahi](#) (1890–1967), a Jerusalem-born Tunisian singer and musician, who composed many songs and wrote piyyutim, especially showing his love for Eretz Yisrael.
- ◆ “Habibi” is an Arabic term of endearment meaning “my love.” The word has entered modern Hebrew.
- ◆ “Yah” in Arabic means “oh” or “hey”; yet the phrase “Yah Habibi” indicates deep gratitude and/or respect.
- ◆ “Yah” in Hebrew is a name of God (think, for example, of the “Yah” in “Halleluyah,” which means “praise God.”)
- ◆ The song has gained in popularity in non-Ashkenazi circles, especially in Israel.
- ◆ It is often sung at religious occasions, especially during the [three pilgrimage holidays](#) — Passover, Shavuot, and Sukkot.

PLAY: [“Habibi Yah Habibi”](#) [Can start at 2:41] 

This is a performance of Asefa, with Dr. Torjman Thomas on the tenor sax. The musical intro begins at 0:43. The vocals begin at 2:03, with the second verse at 2:41. The tempo shifts at 6:27 until the end at 7:49. The entire performance is amazing and exemplifies “*hadesh yameinu*.” Nonetheless, instructors may need to tailor the timing. If time, instructors may wish to discuss how the music helps express a longing for and love of God.

PART 6 — CODA/CONCLUSION (Weaving our learning threads together)

SLIDE 24

Summary

[NOTE: The instructor should catalog responses to the following in a place where all can see (such as a white board), and then add to those responses from the following bullet points, particularly when it was a focus of the instructor. If time is a factor, the instructor might simply ask, “What have we learned today?” However, if time, asking these different kinds of questions may open up more reactions. Instructor may wish to have students take a few minutes to write down their thoughts before having students offer responses.]

Let’s take a few moments to reflect.

- ❓ What is something you have learned today about Moroccan or Persian Jewish experience?
- ❓ What is something you have learned about the role of music in Jewish society in Morocco or Persia?
- ❓ What is something you have learned about music and identity?
- ❓ What is something you have learned about how music challenged boundaries?

We learned how:

- ◆ Jewish artists made a huge mark on their respective communities without compromising their Jewish identities in various ways:
 - Singing (e.g. Zohra El Fassia, Hazzan Yona Dardashti)
 - Musicianship (e.g. Morteza Neydavoud)
 - Composition (e.g. Morteza Neydavoud)
 - Cultivation and Promotion of talent (e.g. Salim Halili, Morteza Neydavoud)
- ◆ Jewish artists cultivated Muslim artists and nurtured their careers (e.g. Neydavoud’s cultivating the artistry and career of Qamar).
- ◆ Zohra el Fassia mastered her craft, pioneering both public performance and recording, thrilling both Muslims and Jews. Singing religious songs at the synagogue and secular songs at the cabaret, El Fassia is an example of how Moroccan Jews are both part of the wider sociocultural landscape and yet pushing its boundaries.
- ◆ Salim Halili opened up and expanded the nature of North African Andalusian music through his singing, songwriting, and in his night club, Le Coq D’Or. His example shows how at least one openly gay artist could forge friendships and relationships with people of all backgrounds, including religious Muslims.
- ◆ Morteza Neydavoud mastered classical Persian musical repertoire as a musician on the tar, and how he expanded that repertoire in his compositions. One of Neydavoud’s most popular compositions has become the “unofficial national anthem of Iranian freedom.”
- ◆ Neydavoud also nurtured female artists, including the “Queen of Persian music,” Qamar.
- ◆ Hazzan Yona Dardashti mastered the vocal repertoire and forms of Persian classical music, and became a sensation on Radio Tehran.
- ◆ Jewish and Muslim musicians often “cross-pollinated” in various ways. (Neydavoud is a prime example, nurturing and often accompanying Muslim singers, and putting the words of Muslim poets to his music).
- ◆ These communities, including those in the United States, have maintained an attachment not only to their Judaism but to their homelands.
- ◆ These communities, including those in the United States, contributed to the musical development and legacy of their homelands.
- ◆ These communities have undergone ruptures due to immigration, but have readjusted well to American life.

OUTRO**SLIDE 25**

As we conclude this session, I present to you a creatively updated version of Zohra El Fassia's classic "*Hak a Mama*," which we heard towards the beginning of this lesson. Here the Jerusalem East and West Orchestra performs, featuring Neta Elkayam. The Jerusalem East and West Orchestra is a multicultural orchestra, consisting of musicians from all three Abrahamic religions and from all sectors that make up Israeli society. It combines and "melts" musical methods from East and West into a musical language that brings together pitches and rhythms from the Arab and Islamic countries with the aesthetics and harmony of western music. Here Elkayam pays homage to Zohra and her legacy, with a song of Zohra's that we heard early in our lesson.

PLAY OUTRO: "*Hak a Mama*" 

End Lesson: Shalom, L'hitraot, etc...**SLIDE 26**