

SEPHARDIC MUSIC AND ITS ROOTS

The rise and much-deserved renaissance of World music in the last few years has created an increasing interest in Sephardic music and has given the Sephardic traditional, popular and liturgical music an unprecedented interest worldwide.

Sephardic music was born in medieval Spain and comprises the music and songs, mainly ballads; cantigas; coplas (calendar cycle songs); canciones (songs performed at the royal courts); romances (Hispanic narrative ballads) and wedding song lyrics, preserved by communities formed by the Jews expelled from the Iberian Peninsula at the end of the 15th century. The term Sephardic refers to those Jews who left Spain and Portugal before or at the time of the Inquisition or even afterwards, living as converted New Christians or resuming their Jewish identities where it was safer to do so.

Sephardic music varies considerably since most of the Spanish Jews set up house in Mediterranean countries, primarily in Greece, Morocco, Turkey and later in Argentina and Israel.

Because so many centuries have passed since the exodus, a lot of the original music has adopted the melodies and rhythms of the various countries where the Sephardim settled in. As a result of this, Sephardic music can be heard with different tunes, languages and different performance styles. Currently, there are many musicians in Israel, Spain and North America who are performing and researching Sephardic songs and even developing new music with elements of Hebrew, Turkish, Arabic, even mixing it with Andalusian flamenco.

This class is intended for musicians as well as those with no musical background. With live performances, using audio and visual material, and concentrating on specific examples, this course will give the students the opportunity to learn and enjoy, as well as listen and analyze some of the historical trends that have shaped the richness and variety of the Sephardic tradition.