

# THE JEWISH JOURNAL

## THE ARTS

2005-09-16

### Sacred Sounds All Over Town

by Ellen Jaffe-Gill, Contributing Writer

There's an inescapable irony in vocalist Vanessa Paloma performing Ladino songs at the San Gabriel Mission, which was founded by Spanish Catholics. It was, of course, Spanish Roman Catholics who expelled Ladino-speaking Jews from Spain in 1492. Paloma called the venue "emotionally charged," but she hopes the music and ambiance will prove to be healing as well as musically appealing.

"Just the fact of sitting in that room and listening to that music will be an interesting experience, and hopefully a powerful one," she said.

Paloma's performance at the 200-year-old mission is one highlight of the 2005 World Festival of Sacred Music, which will be spread out among many Los Angeles locations over a two-week period beginning Saturday.

The festival, directed by Judy Mitoma, will show Angelenos how cultures from around the world find spiritual sustenance through music. Jewish cultures of the Iberian peninsula, Eastern Europe and the Middle East are well represented. Here are some of the notable events:

*Wed., Sept. 21 — Yuval Ron Ensemble. 7 p.m., Alfred Newman Recital Hall at USC; \$20. For tickets, call (213) 740-2167 or visit [www.usc.edu/spectrum](http://www.usc.edu/spectrum)*

Ron, an Israeli composer and record producer, pulls together traditions of Judaism, Islam, and the Armenian Church in music and dance. In this program, Ron's troupe, which

includes artists from Israel, Lebanon, Armenia, Iran, France, and the United States, explore the mystical teachings of different Middle Eastern cultures and the deep connections among them.

Thurs., Sept. 22 — Flor de Serena, with vocalist Vanessa Paloma and guitarist Jordan Charnofsky. Noon, San Fernando Mission, 15151 San Fernando Mission Blvd., Mission Hills; free. For tickets, call (818) 361-0186 or visit <http://www.flordeserena.com/>.

The ensemble, which includes percussion and bass, will play music composed and performed by Sephardim after arriving in the Americas as well as tunes originating in Spain and Portugal. Historian Arthur Benveniste will narrate the musical journey of Spanish Jews after their expulsion from Iberia in the 1490s.

Paloma, who grew up in Colombia, traces her Sephardic heritage to the north of Spain. She formed Flor de Serena with Charnofsky after a trip to Israel, where she discovered music for many obscure Ladino songs.

Sephardic music, she told The Journal, “integrates the Spanish-speaking and Jewish aspects of my life.”

Charnofsky, who began playing with klezmer bands in the early 1990s, isn’t Sephardic but describes Sephardic music as a natural bridge between his instrument, the guitar, which was developed on the Iberian peninsula, and his growing involvement with Jewish music.

*Sun., Sept. 25 — Cantori Domino. 7:30 p.m., John Anson Ford Amphitheater, 2580 Cahuenga Blvd. East, Hollywood; \$25. For tickets, call (323) 461-3673 or visit <http://www.fordamphitheater.org/>.*

This 50-voice choir, will sing Leonard Bernstein’s “Chichester Psalms” accompanied by musicians on harp, timpani and two pianos. The selection of psalms encompass themes of joy, innocence, war, trust, hope and unity.

Conductor Maurita Phillips-Thornburgh, though not Jewish, has been music director for the High Holidays at Stephen S. Wise Temple for 14 years.

“I don’t know of a time when this [work] wouldn’t be timely, but it seems particularly timely

now,” she said.

*Mon., Sept. 26 — The Psalms of Ra. 6 p.m., 8 p.m. and 10 p.m., Alchemy Building, 5209 Wilshire Blvd., Los Angeles; \$25. For tickets: (323) 769-5069 or visit <http://www.psalmsofra.com/>*

Jim Berenholtz, who has traveled widely in the Middle East, uses his “neo-ancient” music to illustrate the creative and spiritual cross-fertilization he says existed between the New Kingdom Egyptians and the Jews who lived in Egypt for centuries. He sets ancient Egyptian and Hebrew texts to contemporary sacred music, according to the billing. Some of his works interweave mystical Hebrew incantations with Egyptian mantras; his settings of Hebrew texts include Psalm 116, which speaks of being lifted up after hitting life’s bottom.

*Oct. 1 — World Jewish Music Fest. Noon, 200 Santa Monica Pier, Santa Monica; free. Information: (310) 434-3431 or [www.smc.edu/madison](http://www.smc.edu/madison).*

Westsider Stefani Valadez will perform Ladino songs from Spain and North Africa, and Russian clarinetist Leo Chelyapov will appear with his Hollywood Klezmer Trio. The family-oriented afternoon will also feature Israeli dancing.

The Moscow-born Chelyapov, who first heard klezmer music when his grandfather took him to Jewish weddings in Kiev, had made playing it his “calling” by the time he arrived in Los Angeles in 1992.

“It touches my Jewishness, and it feels natural to me,” he told The Journal. Not only is klezmer music historically identified with weddings, which Chelyapov called “a mystical point of life,” but it often employs liturgical texts and, most importantly, he said, “it’s supposed to elevate your spirit.”

*For a complete schedule, visit <http://www.festivalofsacredmusic.org/> or call (310) 825-0507.*