

74TH SEASON OF CONCERTS

DECEMBER 13, 2015 • NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART





Photo by Jeff Malet

PROGRAM

3:30 • West Building, West Garden Court

Trio Sefardi

Susan Gaeta, voice, guitar, percussion

Tina Chancey, bowed strings, backup voice, percussion

Howard Bass, lute, guitar, percussion

Five Celebrations

1. Judaism

La Bendicion de la Madre (Melody, Flory Jagoda)

Cuando el Rey Nimrod

Mizmor l'David (Istanbul)

Boka del Dio (Arrangement, Flory Jagoda)

2. Love and Courtship

Dieziocho Anyos (Arrangement, Flory Jagoda)

Yo t'Admiro (Jack Mayesh)

Morenika Sos (Balkans)

Los Kaminos de Sirkedji (Istanbul)

Yo Hanino, Tu Hanina (Melody, Arrangement, Flory Jagoda)

3. Marriage

Scalerica de Oro

Mi Suegra, la Negra

Oildo Mi Novia (Arrangement, Flory Jagoda)

4. Food and Drink

La Vida Do por el Raki

Mi Vino tan Querido

Siete Modos de Guisar Berenjenas

5. Hanuka

Hanuka, Hanuka (Flory Jagoda)

Las Tiyas (Flory Jagoda)

Ocho Kandelikas (Flory Jagoda)

The Musicians

Founded in January 2010, Trio Sefardi is a confluence of three performers who share a love of, and wide-ranging experience with Sephardic music, playing with La Rondinella, the Western Wind, and National Heritage Fellowship honoree Flory Jagoda. The *Washington Post's* chief music critic Ann Midgette praised the group's "lovely and luminous performance of Sephardic songs" and vocalist Susan Gaeta's voice as "compelling," in a review of a recent performance at the Kennedy Center with the Post-Classical Ensemble.

Group members combine a respect for tradition with a creative approach to arranging and scoring that is dedicated to bringing the vibrant past into the living present. Trio Sefardi's first public performance was at the Kennedy Center's Millennium Stage in November 2010. Since then the group has performed at the Washington Folk Festival, the Takoma Park Folk Festival, the residence of the Spanish ambassador, and many other local venues. In December 2011, they were featured performers in the Washington Revels production, *Andalusian Treasures*, at Lisner Auditorium.

Members of the trio pursue a variety of musical interests beyond Sephardic music. Susan Gaeta, who has worked closely with Flory Jagoda for many years, sings with a jazz ensemble and teaches science at the Nysmith School. Tina Chancey is the founder and director of HESPERUS, known for its pioneering crossover programs and innovative scoring for silent films. Howard Bass has performed programs of Renaissance lute songs and solos for many years with mezzo-soprano Barbara Hollinshead, and also performs regularly with Flory Jagoda. Chancey and Bass have both performed with the National Gallery Chamber Players and in other combinations. The trio's first recording, *Sefardic Celebration*, was released in 2011.

Program Notes

The Sephardim are descendants of the Jews who lived in Spain prior to the expulsion mandated by Ferdinand and Isabella in 1492. Their infamous edict was issued at the time of the final victory over the Moors at Granada. The Moors, Muslims from North Africa, had occupied much of the Iberian Peninsula since the eighth century, and Jews had lived peacefully and productively on the Iberian Peninsula since Roman times. Jews who refused to convert to Catholicism were forced to leave Spain. Many crossed the border into Portugal, only to be expelled in 1497. Over time the Jews of Spain dispersed to the north (the Netherlands and England), to the south (North Africa, especially Morocco and Tunisia), and to the greater Mediterranean region (southern France, Italy, Greece, and especially Turkey, and thence to the Balkans). It is believed that some Spanish Jews were among the first European colonists to the New World.

The exiled people could take only what they could carry with them. One thing they carried was their language and oral culture. In exile, many continued to speak Spanish, or Judeo-Spanish, which is now commonly called Ladino (from *ladinar*, a word that means to translate sacred Hebrew texts into Spanish). The term Sephardim comes from a reference in the book of the Prophet Obadiah: "The exiles from Jerusalem who are in Sepharad will possess the towns of the Negev." It is a term that became common only following the expulsion.

The song tradition was carried and transmitted mainly by women, a tradition that goes back more than five centuries. Andrés Bernaldez, a Spanish monk who witnessed the expulsion, wrote the following account: "They were abandoning the land where they were born. Small and large, young and old, on foot, atop mules or dragged by wagons, each one followed his own route toward the chosen port of departure. They stopped by the side of the road, some collapsing from exhaustion, others sick, others dying. There was not a person alive who could not have pity for these unfortunate people. Everywhere along the road they were begged to receive baptism, but their rabbis told them to refuse, while urging *the women to sing and play tambourines* to keep their spirits up."

While some Sephardic songs can be reliably traced back to Spain, many new songs have been composed over the centuries. Like folksongs everywhere, the Sephardim sing of love, loss, daily life, holidays, family, and, sometimes, historical events. Songs were sung mainly in the home, though in the early twentieth century choirs from the Balkans were formed and sang some songs at public events. Today, while there are still Sephardic people living in Turkey, Israel, the United States, and some South American countries, most European Sephardic communities were destroyed in the Holocaust, and Ladino is a dying language.

Today's program draws from older traditional songs as well as from repertoire composed in traditional form in the twentieth century. In almost every instance with the older songs, the composers' names are long forgotten. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries ethnomusicologists and folklorists saved hundreds of Sephardic songs from oblivion. All too often, however, these scribes neglected to include complete documentation when their work was published; some collections include a city or country where the songs were collected, but some provide no clues. Collectors working in the post-World War II era tended to be more careful, but much was lost. What is clear, though, is that favorite

songs were sung in Sephardic communities throughout the Balkans, Turkey, the Middle East, and North Africa. Variations in melody and text are common, and it is likely that singers would invent their own melodies for older texts, or use older melodies for new words.

We include in this program a few songs by Flory Jagoda, the esteemed Bosnian Sephardic singer and composer who has lived in the Washington area for more than six decades. Jagoda's songs tell of family life, celebrations, holidays, love, longing, and loss, and many have become standard in Sephardic singers' repertoires. A few, like her Hanukkah song, "Ocho Kandelikas," are often thought to be songs from long ago, rather than by a living composer, showing Jagoda's firm roots in tradition. It is, in fact, almost impossible to find "old" Hanukkah songs, since the holiday was considered to be a very minor one in the Jewish calendar. To Jagoda's two Hanukkah songs, we add "Las Tiyas," which she wrote about how her family celebrated the holidays (including Hanukkah) at the homes of her many aunts.

Since food and drink are always part of Hanukkah, we have added songs from other traditional sources to recognize the joy of sharing meals at important, celebratory moments. The other songs on the program, some of which are performed as instrumentals, are songs of courtship, lost love, and story-songs, which the Sephardim refer to as *romanzas*, otherwise known as ballads.

The Seventy-Fourth Season of The William Nelson Cromwell and F. Lammot Belin Upcoming Concerts

Marriotts Ridge High School Madrigals
Community Caroling
December 19, Saturday, 1:30 and 2:30
West Building Rotunda

Central Bucks West High School Choir
Community Caroling
December 20, Sunday, 1:30 and 2:30
West Building, West Garden Court

Eric Mintel Quartet featuring
A Charlie Brown Christmas
50th Anniversary Concert
Central Bucks West High School Choir
December 20, Sunday, 3:30
West Building, West Garden Court

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