

Yoel Ben-Simhon and The Sultana Ensemble MIMOUNA

Tuesday, April 29, 2008 at 8pm

PROGRAM

The program runs approximately 90 minutes without intermission.

1. **Mimouna Medley** -- Traditional Moroccan
2. **Sidi Mansur** -- Traditional Tunisian
3. **Berber Blues** -- Lyrics & music by Yoel Ben-Simhon
4. **Shatty Ya Dinye** -- Fairouz & Rahbani brothers
5. **Quando El Ray Nimrod** -- Traditional Ladino
6. **Forgiveness Hymn** -- Lyrics & music by Yoel Ben Simhon;
Chorus -- Moroccan hymn
7. **Longa Mimouna** by Yoel Ben Simhon
8. **Zaman El Sallam** - Lyrics by Fathi Kasem; Music by Amnon Aboutbul
9. **Deror Yikra** - Lyrics by Dunash Ben Lavrat; Music - traditional Yemenite
10. **Ya Rayah** -- Lyrics & music by Dahmane El Harrachi
11. **Yigdal** - Lyrics by Rabbi Daniel Ben-Yehuda Hadayan; Music by Yoel Ben-Simhon
12. **Moroccan Medley** -- Traditional Moroccan

MUSICIANS

Yoel Ben-Simhon: Vocals, oud, flamenco guitar
Rami El Asser: Percussion
Brahem Fribgane: Percussion
Rachid Halihal: Andalusian violin
Emmanuel Mann: Bass
Harel Shachal: Turkish clarinet, sax, zurna, ney

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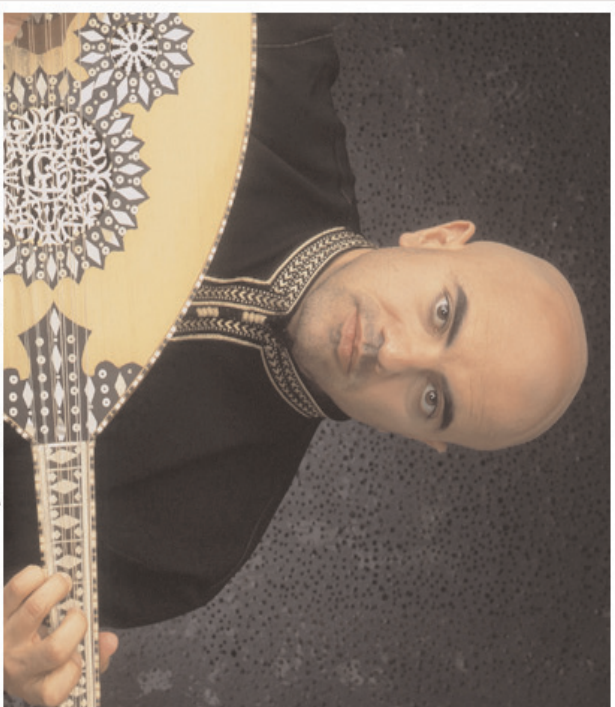


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SEPHARDIC NIGHTLIFE MUSIC THREE CONCERT SERIES

Presented by American Sephardi Federation and Yeshiva University Museum



Yoel Ben-Simhon

TUESDAY, APRIL 29, 2008 AT 8PM

MIMOUNA, or Eating Bread Again

The band, **The Sultana Ensemble**, featuring **Yoel Ben-Simhon**, will draw on Arabo-Andalusian Moroccan music that celebrates the end of Passover. Their music immerses tradition in the cross-cultural currents of contemporary urban life.

Moroccan Jews have used the occasion of Mimouna to open their homes for neighborhood parties, feast on freshly-made traditional pastries and toast the end of Passover. Join us to celebrate Mimouna with the music of The Sultana Ensemble and sweet desserts.

MIMOUNA, or Eating Bread Again

The music series, *Sephardic Nightlife*, concludes with a double celebration. On the one hand, it is time for *minouna*, a Moroccan-Jewish celebration marking the end of Passover that in Israel has spread across many cultural divides, and became a mass event publicly performed in city parks. On the other hand, it is a chance to celebrate the Cinderella of Jewish music, *musiqah mizrahit*, or Israeli "Oriental" music. In both instances, tonight's concert is also a chance to celebrate Israeli musical culture in its 60th anniversary.

A characteristic of Israeli culture is the blurring, or blending, of codified boundaries, which takes place in a context in which cultural distinctions are fundamental, and often violently fostered. In musical terms, this feature manifests itself in the confluence/correspondence of the traditional, art and popular music worlds. A quick formula would say that in modern Israel, intellectuals have molded tradition into popular music. Then popular music shook off its original intellectualism and became the source of new inspiration for all. "Sephardic" music is a case in point. The composers of the first generation of Israel's art music, who immigrated to Palestine in the 1920's and 1930's from Russia and Germany, paid close attention to the sounds of the Land of Israel, and to those brought there by non-European Jewish immigrants. North-African and Middle Eastern musical traditions, including popular song, the Arabic and Turkish *maqam*, and Yemenite Jewish music were the object of intense scrutiny by these European-born musicians, who composed in a "Mediterranean" style.

The cultural label of "*mizrahit*," Oriental, was thus reinterpreted in Israel, where it found a specifically Jewish context. It indicates a dynamic musical culture that moves from East to West, from Northern India to the shores of the Eastern Mediterranean and to North Africa. It is a music that crosses Jewish, Muslim, Christian and Sufi elements, rooted in traditional and classical cultures. But it is also a music that carries within itself the experience of colonialism, of cultural adaptation, of necessary compromises with the dominant West. It is not the same as the European "Orientalism" (even when it shares similar origins), as it blends European attitudes towards cultural exoticism with the direct experience of Jewish musicians that settled in Israel from the Arab and Muslim worlds. It's unique, it's at once high and low culture, classical and popular, and it is re-framing our world faster than we think.

As described in an important book by Motti Regev and Edwin Seroussi (*Popular Music and National Culture in Israel*, 2004), Israeli *musiqah mizrahit* started out as an underdog phenomenon, played at parties and circulated through cassette tapes sold at the old Tel Aviv bus station, then went on to take over not only the official music market and the pop music charts, but also the art music scene. (It has also catalyzed academic interest from around the world). It mixes Moroccan, Turkish, Greek and Iraqi elements with international pop-rock, electric guitars and drum sets, but also glorifies the *ūd*, the Arab ancestor of the lute. It is made of love songs and of religious poetry, and often blurs the distinction between the two. It is a music that makes sense to New York City's ears today, but also that comes from very, very far away.

Moroccan Jewish music plays a central role in Israel's *musiqah mizrahit*. It is a music that mixes Arab-Andalusian origins with Africa, and then again with European colonial influences (from France and beyond: think *Casablanca*), Tunisian and Algerian pop and *rai*. It is also the sound of the ethnic revolt of Israel's mizrahi Jews, the *pantherim*, Israel's "black panthers," whom in the 1970's came out of Jerusalem's Musrara neighborhood, a Moroccan "slum" located right next to the Green Line, at the border with East Jerusalem. While the Wikipedia entry for "Mimouna" dates from September of 2006, the public celebration of this Moroccan-Jewish post-Passover custom involving food, music, and festive celebrations through the night in which Passover ends, has been a staple of Israeli public culture for many years. While its most evident manifestation is a mass barbecue in Israel's city parks, it is also the mark that the social struggles of the 1970's, which opposed the culturally and economically oppressed mizrahi minority to Israel's Ashkenazi elites, have impressed on national culture.

As represented in the repertoire of The Sultana Ensemble, an Israeli-New York music group, the *Mimouna* and *musiqah mizrahit* activate Moroccan sounds, Latino beats, Tunisian pop, Middle Eastern and Yemenite Hebrew liturgical poems, and the ubiquitous and omnipresent Ladino song, *Kuando el Re Nimrod*, a 20th-century elaboration on a traditional copla, *El nacimiento de Abraham*, or "the birth of Abraham." Only in Israel, and only in New York City, are these sounds truly native.

—Francesco Spagnolo