

MUSIC OF MANY WORLDS

18th-century Vocal Works from Amsterdam's Sephardic Synagogue

Sunday, 9 May 2021
4:30 pm CET / 10:30 am ET
Sweelinckzaal, Conservatorium van Amsterdam

Amesiah	Abraham de Caçeres (c. 1718-1738)
Amesiah	Cristiano Giuseppe Lidarti (1730-1795)
Le-el Elim	Caçeres
Kaddish	Aramaic prayer (Melody from 4 th aria of <i>Le-el Elim</i>)
Azamer Sir	M. Mani
Col anesama	Anonymous Arr. Jonathan Salamon
Boij besalom	Lidarti
Col anesama	Lidarti
Aria d'Ester, from <i>Ester</i> (1774)	Lidarti

He who begins our God's Torah,
 Days many as sand, sons as many as sand
 He will see before our eyes.

Kaddish (Aramaic prayer) _____ Caçeres (Sarphati's adaptation)

Glorified and sanctified be God's great name
 throughout the world which He has created
 according to His will.

Azamer sir (*I will sing a song*) _____ M. Mani

Text: Abraham ben Immanuel da Silva

1. I will sing a song in God's temple,
 For its dedication,
 To grow in strength and in front of all people His glorious name.
- 2-3. I will search for the face of God,
 Who will comfort His chosen people.
 God will send a savior to quickly redeem His people.

Col anesama (*All who rejoice*), Psalm 156 _____ Anonymous

Let every soul praise the Lord, hallelujah.

Boij Besalom (*Come in peace*) _____ Lidarti

Addressing the Lord's divine presence

Come in peace, the crown of her husband
 Also in joy and cheer
 With the belief of the chosen people
 Come, O bride!

Col anesama (All who rejoice) Lidarti

Let every soul praise the Lord, hallelujah.
Enlarge, bless, praise, and sing to the Lord.

Aria d'Ester Lidarti

Text: Rabbi Jacob Raphael Saraval

Esther is preparing to meet the King, to save the Jewish people from the murderous plot of Haman.

Why is my heart racing?
For this fine clothing, and this crown.
Kings of the earth, and their riches, they mean nothing
When compared to the Lord.

Notes on the Program

The story of Amsterdam's Sephardic (Portuguese) community in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries brings together many worlds—ancient, and modern; divine, and secular—mediated by the community's Iberian past and integration into a Dutch identity. Iberian Jews who had been forced to convert to Catholicism (known as *conversos*) began arriving in the Netherlands in the late 1500s. They established themselves in a place more profoundly tolerant of Judaism than anywhere in Europe at the time and sought to revive their Jewish faith after the discontinuity suffered through the forced conversions. The Netherlands, and Amsterdam in particular, became significant beacons of Jewish culture; indeed, Amsterdam was renowned as a printing center of Hebrew texts in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and was called the “Jerusalem of the North.”

Of prime importance to the Portuguese Jewish community was the reestablishment of educational institutions. In 1616, they founded Ets Haim (Tree of Life) to restore the study of Hebrew, Torah, and Talmud, and as a source of intellectual nourishment for the burgeoning community. The philosopher Baruch Spinoza, for example, received his education at Ets Haim. The three main Sephardic groups consolidated in 1639 into one called *Talmud Torah*. The community reimported liturgical customs, including traditional melodies, from Sephardic communities in North Africa and the East Mediterranean. Ets Haim is now known as a library, with a collection that houses tens of thousands of printed works and hundreds of manuscripts, including many of the pieces on this program. It is the oldest Jewish library of its kind in the world and is part of the complex that includes the magnificent synagogue, called the “Esnoga,” which was completed and inaugurated in 1675. Restoring the practice of Judaism while integrating into Dutch society yielded many cultural confluences, of which notated music remains a potent exemplar.

Music was a beloved part of the Dutch Sephardic community, inside and outside of the synagogue. Many rabbis were recognized for their musical abilities. Among them were Isaac Aboab da Fonseca

(1605-1693), renowned as a virtuoso harpist, and Abraham Pereira, who was a celebrated singer and harpist as well as the leader of the Talmudical college from 1659. In secular society, the Suasso, Teixeira, and Capadoce families were, among others, recognized for their great support of chamber music and opera. Leopold Mozart remarked upon the notability of these families when he visited Amsterdam in 1766. One of the most prosperous men in the Hague, Francesco Lopes de Liz, hosted extravagant opera productions and concerts in his home. For two years, de Liz hired French violinist Jean-Marie LeClair (1697-1764) to direct and perform in his concerts.

One can trace the evolution of musical style on this program from the lighter, baroque-oriented texture of Abraham de Caçeres (c. 1718-1738), to the early-classical symmetry in the music of M. Mani and Cristiano Giuseppe Lidarti (1730-1795). The music of the synagogue kept pace with changes in musical taste beyond its walls, showing a progressive engagement with European musical culture. The pieces chosen for this program—with one or two singers, basso continuo, and strings—are a cross section of liturgical music written across several decades and compiled in late eighteenth-century manuscripts housed in Ets Haim. The aria from *Ester* is from a manuscript found in 1998 by Israel Adler at the Cambridge University Library in Cambridge, UK, and the manuscript containing the Kaddish adaptation now resides in Israel.

The first two composers on the program, who each wrote somber devotional pieces titled *Amesiah*, left a lasting impact on the music of the Portuguese synagogue. Abraham de Caçeres, a member of the community, was the synagogue's resident composer and harpsichordist who was clearly trained in the Italian style. Cristiano Giuseppe Lidarti (1730-1795), an influential Christian composer born in Vienna, was commissioned from afar to write an abundance of works for the Sephardic community, including the grand oratorio *Ester* in 1774. Both *Amesiah* pieces, with identical text and instrumentation (two voices and violins with basso continuo), are found together in the same manuscript at Ets Haim.

Caçeres composed *Le-el Elim* in 1738 for Simchat Torah, a celebratory occasion demarcating the end of the Torah reading cycle and honoring the bridegroom of the Torah and the bridegroom of Genesis. The piece alternates between solo and duet arias for two sopranos and basso continuo. *Le-el Elim* is written in a courtly Italianate manner called the *galant* style, the type of fashionable music beloved by discerning concertgoers in the eighteenth century. It is significant that such a style, associated with Christian society-at-large, would become part of Jewish musical tradition. In addition to this style, Israel Adler argues that some of the lines may be evocative of Ashkenazic (Jews from Central/Eastern Europe) cantorial melodies. Each voice part would have been sung by a male chazzan (cantor), as women were not allowed to sing in the synagogue. The manuscript housed in Ets Haim notes that the two *chazzanim* who sang (in falsetto) at the celebration in 1738 were Aron Cohen de Lara and Semuel Rodrigues Mendes; Caçeres himself played the harpsichord at the piece's premiere. It is noteworthy that this manuscript, compiled several decades after the occasion, would have the names of the performers inscribed. The performance must have made a lasting impression on the community. Indeed, *Le-el Elim* is Caçeres' finest composition.

The following piece is an arrangement of the **Kaddish**, an Aramaic prayer of praise or mourning central to Jewish ritual. It is found in the late eighteenth-century manuscript of the chazzan Iossef de Ishac Sarphati (c. 1743–1772), which is now housed in Israel. Sephardic *chazzanim* developed a tradition of overlaying texts on existing tunes that were popular among the congregation. Sarphati set the Kaddish to the beautiful and arresting melody from the fourth aria of Caçeres's *Le-el Elim*, another indication of Caçeres' continued celebration within the community.

Azamer sir was composed by M. Mani (whose identity is not known) in 1773 for Shabbat Nachamu, a festival of consolation and comfort in remembering the destructions of the Temple of Jerusalem. Mani's piece, a series of three arias for solo voice and continuo, strongly evokes the style of *galant* opera. The first movement is sweet and innocently melodic. In the second movement, Mani connects the musical texture intimately to the text. While the congregation is "searching for the face of God," so too does the music search (like a *stile antico* *ricercare*, Italian for "to search out"), with the bass following the voice in dialogue. The triumphant third movement, with the same text, weds the motivic material of the first movement with the imitative texture of the second.

The anonymous *Col anesama* is a highly expressive piece for *a cappella* voice found in the same manuscript as *Le-el Elim*. For this program, an original bass line was composed for the harpsichord and cello to play. The piece, with a text derived from Psalm 156, was performed on celebratory occasions like Simchat Torah and Shabbat Nachamu in praise of the Lord. The remarkable melody—chromatic, probing, and filled with vivid contrasts of harmony and register—alternates between metered and recitative-like sections. *Col anesama* shows off the brilliant voice of the chazzan, likely meant to impress the congregation and augment the spirit of devotion.

The next two pieces by Lidarti, *Boij besalom* and *Col anesama*, are in a similar style and feature independent violin parts, unlike the *Amesiah* by both Caçeres and Lidarti. The latter movements of *Col anesama* are exuberant and exhibit a playful energy. The amount of surviving music written for Simchat Torah and Shabbat Nachamu shows that celebratory displays of artistry through music were important to the spirit of these events.

And finally, Lidarti's *Ester* oratorio from 1774—commissioned by the Sephardic community in Amsterdam—is a work of substantial importance, yet hardly studied and rarely heard. The Hebrew libretto by Rabbi Jacob Raphael Saraval is derived from the same source as Handel's English-language *Esther* oratorio from the first half of the eighteenth century. In this aria, Esther asks herself how her heart could race when facing the king (her husband), when the earthly riches she witnesses are incomparable to the majesty of the Lord. Lidarti represents Esther's beating heart with pulsating rhythms, sudden changes in mood, and diminutions in the violins that create a sense of mounting excitement as Esther ponders her emotional state.

Lidarti's *Ester* is an apt culmination of the Amsterdam Sephardic community's eighteenth-century story. The Biblical narrative is told in an unprecedented setting meant for the entertainment of Jews rather than Christians. Hebrew is not attached to traditional melodies or cantillations, but the popular style of Italian opera, the *lingua franca* of European art music. After the suffering endured in the previous centuries—the difficult loss both of Judaism and a home in Iberia—the Sephardic community had triumphed. Having achieved an extraordinary degree of security and comfort in the Netherlands, the Portuguese Jews were able to not only practice their faith, but also develop a thriving culture while freely participating in society.

— Jonathan Salamon

Performer Biographies

Shira Miriam Cohen, *soprano*

Israeli soprano Shira Miriam Cohen started her musical education playing the clarinet. Shira later graduated with excellence from the Reut School of the Arts in Haifa as a singer. In 2020, she received her bachelor's degree in Voice from the Buchmann-Mehta School of Music, Tel Aviv. Currently she is focusing on early music and continuing her studies at the Conservatorium van Amsterdam with Xenia Meijer.

Her operatic repertoire includes the role of Pamina (*Die Zauberflöte*), Mrs. Gobineau (*The Medium*), Ms. Pinkerton (*The Old Maid and the Thief*), as well as several roles in Purcell's *The Fairy Queen* and Ravel's *L'enfant et les Sortilèges*. In 2019, she performed the role of Lucifero Agellico in the oratorio *La Caduta Dell'angeli* by Francesco Rossi with Phoenix Ensemble. Shira has performed with leading Israeli orchestras, including Tel Aviv Soloists, Jerusalem Baroque Orchestra, and The Barrocade Ensemble, under conductors including Barak Tal, David Shemer, and Yi-An Xu. Shira is also a member of the Bella Tel-Aviv Trio. The trio has performed many concerts in Israel and completed a concert tour in the Guangdong province in China in 2019. Shira is a recipient of the Buchmann-Mehta Excellence Scholarship (2018-2020), and the America-Israel Cultural Foundation Scholarship (2020-2021).

Anna Bachleitner, *soprano*

Bavarian Soprano Anna Bachleitner is an early music specialist, praised by the *Südbadische Zeitung* as a “highly flexible voice artist and richly equipped with nuanced colours of sound and expression.” She is currently a member of the LaCetra Vokalensemble Basel (Switzerland) and is the artistic director and founder of Ensemble Mandelkärn, which mainly performs seventeenth-century music. Anna studied with Evelyn Tubb and Gerd Türk at the Schola Cantorum Basiliensis in Basel. During her studies there, she worked with Anthony Rooley, Leonardo Garcia Alarcon, Bruce Dickey, and Frithjof Smith, among others. Currently, Anna is continuing her studies at the Conservatorium van Amsterdam with Xenia Meijer.

Among others, she has performed in the ‘Abendmusiken in der Predigerkirche’ (dir. J.-A. Bötticher) in Basel, in the concert series of ‘FAMB’ (Freunde Alter Musik Basel) under the direction of Vaclav Lukas, Andrea Marcon and Jörg-Andreas Bötticher, the Forum:Alte Musik (A) and “Offenes Palais Dresden” (D). Along with her work with chamber music groups, Anna loves Baroque opera. In 2018 she took the leading role in Purcell’s *Dido & Aeneas* with Ensemble Locatelli under the direction of Thomas Chigioni in Bergamo. In a production of Händel’s *Rodelinda* by the Schola Cantorum Basiliensis with staging by Deda Christina Colonna, Anna worked on “Rodelinda.” In 2020 Anna would have performed “Anima” in *La Rappresentazione di Anima, et di Corpo* by E. de’Cavallieri under the musical direction of Francesco Pedrini.

Alyssa Wright, *baroque violin*

A graduate of the San Francisco Conservatory of Music, and a current student at the Conservatorium van Amsterdam, Alyssa Wright was born to a Thai mother and American father and raised in Japan. Starting violin at age four, Alyssa studied with Izumi Takeuchi for 12 years. She also played in the Chiba Youth Orchestra from 2008–2014 and won the Shimamura Music Competition. She has participated in early music summer festivals such as the Oregon Bach Festival, the Viola Da Gamba Conclave, and the American Bach Soloists Academy. At SFCM, she received a bachelor's degree and a Historical Performance diploma. Alyssa studied modern violin with Ian Swensen and baroque violin with Elizabeth Blumenstock and was a three-time consecutive winner of the Conservatory's Baroque concerto competition. Currently, she is pursuing a master's degree in early music performance, studying baroque violin with Shunske Sato and Sayuri Yamagata.

Daniel Lee, *baroque violin*

Daniel is currently undergoing a contract study at the Conservatorium van Amsterdam in the class of Shunske Sato in an effort to gain extensive knowledge on playing the baroque violin. In 2017, Daniel graduated from the Zurich School of the Arts, where he completed his master's degree in the class of Prof. Ilya Gringolts. Prior to moving to Switzerland, he spent 4 years in Amsterdam under the tutelage of Ilya Grubert. Daniel has participated in numerous masterclasses over the years, given by violinists such as Arnold Steinhardt, Jaap van Zweden, Pavel Vernikov, Liviu Prunaru, Svetlana Makarova, and others. In 2015, Daniel won 1st Prize at the International Violin Competition in Fundao, Portugal, and the year after, the 3rd Prize at the International Violin Competition Francesco Geminiani in Verona, Italy. Festivals that Daniel has participated in include the Pacific Music Festival in Sapporo, Japan, and the Chautauqua Music Festival in New York.

His professional involvements include being a member of Lisa Jacob's chamber ensemble The String Soloists, which is based in Amsterdam and regularly performs abroad in various concert venues across Europe, as well as occasionally freelancing with the Antwerp Symphony Orchestra in Belgium. Besides playing the violin, Daniel is also a composer—he was one of the ten prize winners of Germany's national composition competition known as "Jugend Komponiert."

Hyejin Jang, *baroque cello & viola da gamba*

Cellist Hyejin Jang was born in Seoul, South Korea, and completed a bachelor's degree in Early Music at the Hochschule für Künste in Bremen (Germany) and is currently pursuing a master's degree at the Conservatorium van Amsterdam under the tutelage of Prof. Viola de Hoog. She has participated in masterclasses with some of the most renowned early music specialists in the world, including Job ter Haar, John Holloway, Alessandro Quarta, Roel Dieltiens and Werner Matzke. As a concert cellist, Hyejin is frequently involved in many chamber and orchestral projects, both as soloist and continuo player. In 2018, with her ensemble, she won the first prize of the Risonanza Early Music Competition in Italy.

Jonathan Salamon, *harpsichordist*

American harpsichordist Jonathan Salamon has performed and given lectures at festivals and conferences in the United States and in Europe. In 2019, he was a prizewinner at the Mathieu Duguay Early Music Competition at the 44th edition of the Festival International de Musique Baroque de Lamèque, Canada. In the spring of 2020, Jonathan became the Principal Harpsichordist of the Chamber Orchestra of New York. Most recently, he won a 2020-2021 U.S. Fulbright Award to Amsterdam to conduct research on eighteenth-century Sephardic music at the Ets Haim library while working with early keyboard specialists at the Conservatorium van Amsterdam.

Jonathan is committed to supporting early music communities and is a member of Early Music America's Emerging Professional Leadership Council. A native of New York City and Connecticut, Jonathan received his Bachelor of Music degree in Piano Performance from New York University, studying with Seymour Bernstein. He also holds a Master of Music degree in Harpsichord Performance from the Yale School of Music, where he studied with Arthur Haas, and is currently a Doctor of Musical Arts candidate at Yale.

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Emanuel de Witte, *Interior of the Portuguese synagogue of Amsterdam*, 1680