

*Yasmin Levy's Ladino ballads and flamenco songs: background  
for students of Spanish*

*Yasmin Levy canta romances ladinos y canciones flamencas:  
Orientación para los estudiantes de Hispánicas*

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**Resumen:** Yasmin inició su carrera cantando los romances antiguos de la tradición llamada ladina de los judeo-españoles o sefardíes. Las comunidades judías, radicadas en España desde el Imperio romano, florecieron durante el reinado de Alfonso X (1252-1284 AD). En 1492 los judíos practicantes fueron expulsados de España. Se desparramaron por todo el Mediterráneo, conservando sobre todo en sus canciones su forma de hablar castellano. Se detallan las características principales de la lengua ladina. En su primer disco compacto Yasmin canta diez canciones en el ladino antiguo. En el segundo disco maneja una mayor variedad de fuentes y pretende 'fusionar' el ladino y el flamenco. Se comentan dos canciones de cada disco. Dos discos posteriores y un DVD ofrecen más material para los profesores y estudiantes de Hispánicas que quieran comprender mejor la cultura de la Edad Media española.

**Palabras clave:** Yasmin Levy. Romances ladinos. Canciones flamencas.

**Summary:** Yasmin's career started with ballads from the Judaeo-Spanish (Sephardic) or Ladino tradition. Jewish communities, established in Spain since Roman times, flourished under Alfonso X (1252-1284 AD). In 1492 practising Jews were driven out of Spain. They re-settled all over the Mediterranean, preserving their 15<sup>th</sup>-century Spanish especially in their songs. The major features of Ladino are outlined. Yasmin's first CD has ten songs in archaic Spanish. In her second CD she draws from wider sources and seeks to 'fuse' the Ladino and Flamenco modes. Two songs from each CD are highlighted. Two later CDs and a DVD provide further materials for teachers and students of Spanish seeking better understanding of Spain's medieval culture.

**Key Words:** Yasmin Levy. Ladino ballads. Flamenco songs.

**Y**asmin Levy was born in Jerusalem in December 1975. Both parents were born in Turkey. In Israel her father, Yitzhak Levy, became a pioneer researcher and devoted recorder, singer, broadcaster and compiler (fourteen volumes from 1959 onwards) of the music of the Spanish Jews (the Sephardim). The Sephardim spoke Ladino, a form of late fifteenth-century Spanish mixed with some elements of Hebrew vocabulary and pronunciation, and their music is often called Ladino music. Her father died when Yasmin was very young. Her mother, Kochava Levy, a trained singer, sang in Ladino accompanied on the piano by the young Yasmin. In her late teens Yasmin began to study Spanish language and Flamenco music. One day in Spain, her Flamenco tutor asked Yasmin herself to sing: mother and tutor were astonished at the quality of the voice and of the singing. Having originally planned to train as a vet, Yasmin is now a professional singer of Sephardic ballads and love-songs and of Flamenco.



*Yasmin Levy. Imagen cedida por Paul Burger*

Small communities of Jews settled in Roman Spain in the first and second centuries CE (Christian Era). After the Roman Empire, the Spanish Jews suffered persecution and forced conversion under Visigothic (by now Christian) kings like Sisebuto (612-621 CE). Their communities survived and grew after the Muslim invasion in 711 CE. During the long Christian Reconquest of Spain (711-1492 CE) occasional outbursts of fanaticism and anti-Semitism in the Muslim South led some Jews to re-locate to the Christian North. The high-point of co-existence and mutual

tolerance in Christian Spain came in the reign of Alfonso X *El Sabio* (*The Learned, The Wise*) of Castile (1252-1284 CE) and in the early fourteenth century.

Thereafter, Christian hostility to Jews grew apace. The anti-Jewish riots in Seville and Córdoba in 1391 spread to dozens of Castilian and Aragonese towns and killed thousands: this violence led many Jews to convert to Christianity, becoming *cristianos nuevos*, or *marranos* [*marrano* = pig, hog; (insult) swine; (pejorative) Jewish], as they were termed by the Old Christians. Anti-Jewish sentiment continued to harden, with further outright massacres of *cristianos nuevos* between 1449 and 1481 in Toledo, Córdoba and Sevilla. From 1478 the re-energised Inquisition made its first task the persecution of Jewish converts for suspected heresies: as many as 2.000 former Jews may have been burned at the stake in Andalucía alone between 1481 and 1492.

Granada, the last Moorish stronghold, surrendered in January 1492. The Christian Reconquest of Spain was complete, and Christian Spain triumphant could now declare itself united under one flag, one faith, one culture. The Edict of Expulsion of April 1492 ordered that the Spanish Jews who refused to convert to Christianity be driven out of Spain. If the Jews represented half a million out of a population of around seven millions, some 200.000 – as estimated by Gibson - may have left Spain to re-settle in coastal cities all over the Mediterranean basin.

For four hundred years, the exiled Spanish Jews - and their fifteenth-century Judaeo-Spanish language – survived and prospered in their new host societies. In the early twentieth century the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire gave birth to new nation-states which emphasised the importance of a single national language and culture (shades of Spain in 1492!): this and consequent migrations greatly weakened the Ladino centres in North Africa, Greece, the Balkans and the Middle East. The German Nazi Holocaust (1941-45) swept away tens of thousands of Ladino speakers, utterly destroying many of their major and minor speech communities. After 1945 many survivors of the Holocaust moved to the new state of Israel or to the United States. Today, there remain about 150.000 active speakers of Ladino: many pockets of speakers are very small, and many of the speakers are very elderly.

Yasmin Levy's Sephardic ballads are sung in Ladino, a form of late fifteenth-century Spanish. Then, the Hebrew language was usually reserved for religious or ceremonial songs delivered in the synagogue by men, whereas ballads and love-songs in Ladino were sung by women in the home or at family celebrations: the women sang unaccompanied and without harmony.

The diaspora or scattering of the Spanish Jews after 1492 brought them into contact with the languages and musical traditions of Morocco (known as the *Western Tradition*) and with those of the Ottoman Empire (the *Eastern Tradition*), including Egypt, Turkey, Greece, the Balkans and Jerusalem. Ladino music in exile seems to have

borrowed particularly into the high-pitched, extended ululations of North Africa, the 9/8 time used in Balkan rhythms and the Turkish mode of singing known as *maqam*.

In modern times various instruments have been added, with tambourines and drums featuring especially in wedding songs, and with male singers incorporating the oud (an Egyptian/Middle Eastern lute) and the *quanún* (Arabic dulcimer or zither). The guitar has proved popular in Ladino music in recent times, though Yasmin Levy in Ladino mode favours more traditional instruments like the oud, violin, cello, piano and percussion.

Yasmin Levy's first CD *Romance and Yasmin* appeared in 2000 and earned her nomination for the Best Newcomer in the BBC World Music Awards 2005. Her second CD *La Judería—Ladino and Flamenco* appeared in 2004/2005. Over the past few years she has travelled widely, giving concerts in London, Barcelona, Brussels, Paris, Edinburgh, New York (Carnegie Hall), Los Angeles, San Francisco, Seattle (where synagogue services are held in Ladino) and Singapore. Her third CD *Mano suave* appeared in 2007 and her fourth *Sentir* in 2009. Strong visual support is available in a DVD of her 'Live at the Tower of David (Jerusalem)' concert from 2006 and in several audio and video clips available on the Internet.

This article now looks particularly at her first two CDs.

Yasmin Levy: *Romance and Yasmin* [Adama Music, Connecting Cultures Records, CC 50016 (2000)] [Vocals –Yasmin Levy. Oud and suz (also saz = a long-necked lute) –Yaniv Issac. Violin –Rachel Shubeli. Cello –Rony Cohen. Percussion – Daniel Belgazal, Asaf Zamir, Erez Monk. Bass –Yehuda Ashash. Flute –Nir Prizant. Keyboards –Yuval Levy].

*Romance and Yasmin* contains eleven tracks taken from the collections of Judaeo-Español Romances published by Yitzhak Levy, all in archaic Spanish. The word *Romance* is a little deceptive. The songs are *romances* (narrative ballads), and deal mainly with the pain and happiness of love. In *Noches, noches* (*Nights, Nights*) two older sisters yearn for new experiences while the third and youngest sister is afraid to leave home. [This ballad is rendered in Flamenco mode in *La Judería –Ladino and Flamenco*]. *De Edad de Kinze Anyos* (*Since the Age of Fifteen*) shows a spirited woman giving money to her thief and gambler lover in the hope that he will win more money. In the two-part interchange of the twenty-line prison ballad *Yo en la Prision* (*Me in Prison*) a male prisoner, sentenced to fifteen years for murdering a rival, laments separation from the beloved. She claims he has abandoned her. Though he begs her to attend for him at the synagogue, she abandons him, telling him she has found another (rich) boyfriend. *Ven, kerida, ven, amada* (*Come, Precious, Come, Beloved*) is a pained cry for companionship from a lover much damaged by his experience as an orphan. In *Kondja mia, kondja mia* (*My Rosebud, My Rosebud*) [solo voice, i.e. *a capella*] a young man determined not to fall in love again is in torment, inflamed by a dark-skinned beauty. In *Muestro Senyor Elobenu* (*God,*

*Our Lord*) Moses delivers the Ten Commandments to the Israelites. In *Una Ora en la Ventana (One Hour at the Window)* the lover resents his beloved's sister's presence preventing them from making love. The girl foreseeing illness and death in *Madre, Si Esto Hazina (Mother, If I Become Ill)* rejects first doctors and then prayer-singers and seeks her cure in twelve young men. The smitten young man in *Me Estas Mirando (You Are Looking at Me)* demands that the girl appear on the balcony and identify herself. A lover bereft in *Esta Montanya D'Enfrente (This Mountain Ahead)* wants to proclaim her/his pain. The final track, *Nani, Nani* (solo voice), is a lullaby.

Judaeo-Spanish (Ladino): Christopher J. Pountain in *Exploring the Spanish Language* (2003) and the web site [www.orbilat.com/Languages/Spanish-Ladino/](http://www.orbilat.com/Languages/Spanish-Ladino/) offer good guidance on the main features of Judaeo-Spanish (Ladino).

After 1492, the distances separating the many clusters of Judaeo-Spanish speakers scattered over many Mediterranean cities allowed variants to emerge. Each local host language –Arabic, Turkish, Greek, etc.– had some influence on Judaeo-Spanish, especially in vocabulary and pronunciation. For long, there were no agreed rules for transcription, and care is still needed with transcription.

The key idea is that in mainland Spain Castilian evolved into the form of Spanish we have today. Judaeo-Spanish (Ladino) did not share in these developments. Ladino is a form of fifteenth-century Spanish set and sealed in aspic. It is almost a fossil.

The transcriptions supplied with the first CD *Romance and Yasmin* are for one item a little intimidating for the average student. A religious song *Muestro Senyor Eloheuu (God, our Lord)* includes considerable vocabulary not readily accessible from Castilian: *toeatenu* (law), *los shamayim* (the sky), *abila* (food), *mayim* (water), *lubot shenabim* (our testament), *aseret diberot* (the Ten Commandments), *dinim* (law), *sodot* (secrets), *las neshamot* (the souls) and *shelach na* (send us). The other ten transcriptions in the CD package are much more accessible to a student of contemporary Spanish –once a few adjustments are made.

The lack of written stress marks in Ladino transcriptions can hide future tenses, as in *te contare* (= *te contaré*), *m'arrimare* (= *me arrimaré*), *azere* (= *haré*) and *muerere* (= *moriré*). It can also hide preterites such as *Salto* (= *Saltó*) and *me armo* (= *me armó*). The transcriptions also use the apostrophe – not used in modern Spanish – to signal certain cases of *sinalefa*, the fusion of vowel sounds between words, as in *d'enamorar*, *komo'l* (for *Komo el*) and *Yo'n* (for *Yo en*).

The student of Spanish also notices in Ladino transcriptions: use of the letter 'k' (*kama*, *komo*, *kínze*, *ke*, *kerido*, *korason*, *porke*, *kulebra*, *kemaron*, *kítar*, *chiko*, *deskuvrir*); the 'sh' in *peshe* (= *pez*), *disho* (= *dijo*), *desbar* (= *dejar*), *desha* (= *deja*), *peshekado* (= *pescado*), *trusho*

(= *trujo* = *trajo*); the use of ‘ny’ in *anyos*, *suenyo*, *Senyor*, *montanya*, *ninya*; ‘y’ for ‘ll’ (*eyas*, *yorar*, *yores*); the missing initial ‘h’ (*ermanikas*, *azer*, *azerte*, *ombre*, *ora*, *ijo*); the use of ‘s’ in *mosedad*, *salvasion*, *ofisio*, *brasos*, *dulse*, *kesi* (= *creci*), *engrandesi* (= *engrandeci*), *sielo*; and the distinct ‘v’ rendering in *mansevo* (*mancebo* = young man), *arrevatar*, *amava*, *matava*, *saver*, *Avlame* (= ¡Háblame!).

Old-style *muestro* and *mos* are the modern *nuestro* and *nos*. Ladino’s initial ‘dj’ in *Yo djurava* and *djugaremos* will evolve in mainland Spain into the modern *jota*. The ‘rd’ combination can change to ‘dr’, as in *guadre* (= *guarde*), *bodre* (= *borde*) and *pedri* (= *perdi*). Ladino logs *buérfano* and *huerta* as *guerfano* and *guerta*. Ladino nouns in –or are feminine, as in *esta dolor*. ‘Usted’ is not yet established.

The modern units *quiero*, *quiere* and *quien* in Ladino transcribe as *kero*, *kere* and *ken*. Old possessive forms show in *la tu mama*, *el mi amor* and *la tuya pierna* alongside modern solutions like *mi kerido*, *mi vida*, *tu nombre*, *mis males*, *en tus brasos*, *mi keavesa* (= *cabeza*), *tu ermana*, *tus palavras*, *mi korason* and *mi guerta*. Ladino first-person present-tense verb forms in –o – as in *esto* and *vo* (and in *do* and *so*) – are the modern *estoy* and *voy* (and *doy* and *soy*). In Ladino first-person singular preterites across the three conjugations end in –i (*empesi*, *tomi*, *pedri*, *ensembri*, *kesi*, *engrandesi*), and second-person singular preterites favour the –tes ending, as in *m’abandonates* (= *me abandon-naste*), *pekates* (= *pecaste*) and *izites* (= *hiciste*).

With this resume the student of contemporary Spanish can begin to engage with old-style Ladino and with the core of medieval Spanish.

Two songs in particular might represent the *Romance and Yasmin* collection.

*Una hora en la ventana* (*One Hour at the Window*) is a delightful tale of a male lover visiting his beloved. As his beloved sits at a window and on a balcony, her sister prevents any physical contact between the girl and the courting male. The angry lover viciously describes the *dueña* figure as *la kalebra de tu hermana* and wonders comically what the girl’s mother ate in pregnancy to make the daughter so sweet. As his mood swings, he yearns for his fair-skinned beauty, yet warns her that many dark-skinned girls have turned many heads in the city of Izmir (Smyrna in Turkey), and then proclaims that he will reject seven *novias* to capture his beloved. [Does the setting in Izmir suggest composition after 1492? Or is this an older song from Spain adapted to the post-1492 experience?]. Though the song should really be sung by a man, the deft Middle Eastern-style percussion and lilting music create a mood appropriate to the Izmir setting, whilst the comical disgust carved into the dense ‘ccchhh’ of *Ab!...* in *Ab!...*, *no mos desha* / *Azer el amor* and Yasmin’s slightly harsh and metallic yet riveting voice make this song a tragicomic vignette worthy of the attentions of a Lorca.

The next track –*Madre, Si Esto Hazina* (*Mother, If I Become Ill*)– is stunning. With three two-line verses and twenty-four words, this song is stripped down to

fundamentals. A young woman, addressing her mother, peeps into the future and sees herself ill and even dying. In the three-part design seen in many ballads the girl makes three requests. She first asks that the mother bring no doctors to her sick-bed and then no prayer-singers to her death-bed. In the last verse she asks positively but yearningly that twelve young men be brought to her: the girl knows herself to be suffering not from everyday illness but from the lack of love. Yasmin's version opens with an orchestra-style Ladino wail approaching the best of tortured Flamenco. She delivers the first line of verse one three times over slowly, gently and plaintively before singing the second line twice over. This pattern repeats in verses two and three, against a musical background that is haunting. This delivery seems a masterpiece of interpretation.

Yasmin Levy: *La Judería-Ladino and Flamenco* [Adama Music, Connecting Cultures Records, CC 50024 (2005)], [Vocals –Yasmin Levy. Guitar –Yecheil Hassan. Cajón (box percussion) –Sasson Levy. Ney (reed or bamboo flute), Turkish Clarinet and Oud –Amir Shasar. Palmas (hand-clappings) –Yecheil and Sasson. Percussion – Rami Shuler].

Yasmin Levy's second CD, also with eleven tracks (plus one instrumental and a short video clip for enhanced CD), takes its title - *La Judería* - from the old Jewish quarter of Seville destroyed in the riot of 1391 CE (now *el barrio de Santa Cruz*). Yasmin believes that - long after the end of Spain's brilliant age of co-existence of the three languages, religions and cultures in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries - echoes of the voices of the Jewish *chazan* (cantor) and of the Muslim *muezzin* (the Mosque official who calls the faithful to prayer five times a day) survived into the beginnings of Flamenco in the eighteenth century. So in this CD she consciously seeks to use varied songs and sources and styles to bring together - to fuse - Ladino music (Judaeo-Spanish by now mixed with North African and Middle Eastern influences) and Flamenco. For Flamenco the guitar is needed. If Yasmin's first CD drew coherence from its single source of materials, the old Ladino ballads, this second CD is more widely sourced, more modern, more open-ended and more ambitious.

*Nací en Alamo* (*I was born in Alamo*), translated from a Greek original, describes the Gypsies' bitter awareness of lacking a homeland of their own. In *Me voy* (*I Am Leaving*, lyrics and music by Yasmin), a lover grateful for the love experience reluctantly moves on. *¡Inténtalo encontrar!* (*Try and Find It*), a New Flamenco piece created by José Luis Montón and the singer Mayte Martín, encourages the constant search for true love. *La alegría* (*Happiness*, lyrics and music by Yasmin) comments -in spite of the title *Happiness* - on the piercing pain of love. The great Flamenco singer Antonio Molina, gifted with a very distinctive voice, inspired Yasmin to create *La niña de las flores* (*The Girl of the Flowers*), a throaty elegy in Molina-esque style to a little girl draped with flowers who -with a pathos reminiscent of *El niño tonto* in *Platero y yo* by Juan Ramón

Jiménez -later disappears and presumably dies. In *Locura* (*Madness*, music by Kostas Pavlidis, lyrics by Yasmin), a young woman dances furiously in the street, driven mad perhaps by the suicide of her lover, the young man unaware that every night she lay waiting for him to come to her. Yasmin's Flamenco interpretation of *La serena* (*The Mermaid* = *La Sirena* in modern Spanish), a traditional Ladino ballad, is followed by an excerpt of a recording made by her father delivering the same song in the old style. *Gracias a la vida* (*Thanks to Life*, lyrics and music by the great Chilean singer-songwriter Violeta Parra) is a sustained hymn to life. Male voices recorded in a Jerusalem synagogue introduce an ancient prayer-song *Keter* (*Crown* –solo voice) before Yasmin re-interprets the Hebrew text in the Flamenco rhythm of *Martinete*. Yasmin adapts another traditional Ladino ballad, *Noches, noches* (*Nights, oh Nights*), already heard on the first CD as a traditional Ladino ballad, to the Flamenco rhythm of *soleá*: two older sisters yearn for love while the third, youngest sister clings still to the mother. The deaths of two friends, a loving couple, killed by a bus, inspired Yasmin to create the lyrics and music of the last love-song, *Y tú y yo subimos al cielo* (*You and Me [sic] are Flying to the Sky*).

Which two songs might we highlight in *La Judería–Ladino and Flamenco*?

*Nací en Álamo* (*I was born in Álamo*) came originally from the hand of the Greek composer Dionissis Tsaknis. It is also known as ‘The gypsy’s song’. With Spanish lyrics by Tony Gatlif and a new musical arrangement by “Gritos de Guerra”, it formed part of the soundtrack of Gatlif’s Flamenco-based film *Vengo* (2000), sung there by Remedios Silva Pisa. The choice of *Álamo* (*Poplar*) as the name for birthplace and homeland is visually and conceptually suggestive (tree/water/fertile land/desirable home), and its third-last syllable stress allows Yasmin to draw out her voice and emphasise the all-important place-name.

The song is very short (46 words), arranged in three verses, with the last three lines of verse three repeating the opening three lines of verse one: *No tengo lugar / Y no tengo paisaje / Yo menos tengo patria... // Con mis dedos hago el fuego / Y con mi corazón te canto / Las cuerdas de mi corazón lloran // Nací en Álamo / Nací en Álamo / No tengo lugar / Y no tengo paisaje / Yo menos tengo patria //* The English version reads: *I have no place/ And I have no landscapes / I have no homeland // With my cold [sic] fingers I make a fire / And with my heart I sing to you / The chords of my heart are crying // I was born in Álamo / I was born in Álamo / I have no place / And I have no landscapes / I have no homeland //*

In terms of text, the categoric negatives of lines one to three suggest bitterness and despair. Lines four and five seem mildly positive in Spanish, as does –for a moment– the idea of a birth in line seven, but this is deceptive: ‘lloran’ in line 6 reminds us that this song is charged with the misery of a displaced and homeless people. (For ‘gypsies’, read ‘Jews’?) Musically, the slow, sombre introduction leads in to a voice that in Spanish is both *desgarrada* (= like that of a victim torn apart and shredded by the sharpest of claws) and *desgarradora* (= heart-rending, i.e. with the power to tear apart and shred the heart of any listener). Yasmin wrenches and bends her voice into Flamenco



shapes that seem to fit the desperate theme perfectly. In phase two the rhythm speeds up a little, without becoming cheery: the singing remains tortured. After phase two the instruments elaborate on the melody and provide a pause before the resting singer then launches into the third and final climactic delivery of the lyrics, with the last verse again sung twice over. A text apparently simple and straightforward, even minimalist, is transformed by careful orchestration, expert musical support and a very distinctive singing voice into a people's moving cry of despair.

Where *Nací en Álamo* is of recent composition, *Noches, noches* (*Nights, oh Nights*, track 1 on *Romance and Yasmin* and track 10 here in *La Judería*), is a traditional Ladino ballad. Its ancient origin is visible in *bueñas* (= *vueeltas*), *salto* (= *salto*), *dixco* (= *dijo*), *Gozemos* (= *Gocemos*), *mociedad* (= *mocedad*), *noviedad* (= *novedad*) and *como la vo dexar?* (= *¿cómo la voy a dejar?*). The structure of the song – as with the equally ancient *Madre, Si Esto Hazína* – looks almost too simple, too straightforward. There are six verses. Each verse counts 16 syllables: 8+7 (+1 extra for the stressed final syllable). The eight-syllable half-line or hemistich (with two exceptions) and the rhymed stressed vowels ending every second half-line recall the Castilian medieval ballad.

Verse one proposes that nights are made for love, verse two visualises bodies tossing restlessly in bed and verse three introduces three sisters. In the second three-part arrangement, each girl speaks in turn. The eldest seeks youth and the second eldest seeks novelty, while the youngest seeks out the comfort of her mother. As the older girls begin to dream of life and love outwith the family, the youngest sister is not yet ready for the grown-up world. This domestic but utterly enchanting story-line shows both the romantic dreamings of girls about to become women and the vulnerability and dependence of the child. In this version of *Noches, noches* Yasmin's moulding and twisting of her voice into the throaty sounds and rippling cascades of Flamenco seems very authentic, as does the background of guitar, percussion and *palmas* [hand-clapping]. This interpretation would – I believe – please knowledgeable Flamenco followers from Cádiz in the west to Almería in the east, though they might not at first spot that the original song is an ancient Judaeo-Spanish ballad.

Yasmin has written: *Con este álbum* (La Judería–Ladino and Flamenco) *estoy orgullosa de combinar las dos culturas, la ladina y la flamenca, al tiempo que incorporo influencias de Oriente Medio. Estoy embarcada en un viaje que tiene más de quinientos años, llevando de nuevo la música Ladina [sic] a Andalucía, mezclándola con el flamenco –el estilo que todavía tiene la memoria musical de los árabes y el mundo judeo-español– y con las canciones del mundo árabe. En cierto modo, es una ‘reconciliación musical’ de la historia.* Yasmin's quest for a 'musical reconciliation of history' is an immense enterprise.

Certainly Yasmin Levy's *Romance and Yasmin* offers a fascinating and musically exhilarating insight into Judaeo-Spanish (Ladino) language and culture, a world that was crucially important in the formation of medieval (and modern) Spain but is now a

world “in terminal decline” (Pountain). As it dies, that culture finds an exceptional singer and musicians able to bring alive its most ancient and intimate ballads and love songs. This same singer, born in Jerusalem and brought up in Israel, seems especially gifted also in Andalusian music. In *La Judería-Ladino and Flamenco*, with a different though equally skilled group of musicians, she thrillingly infuses very different original songs from herself, from other lands and cultures and song-writers, and from Ladino, with the shuddering rhythms and agonising cadences of Flamenco. To hear Yasmin sing *Noches, noches* in Ladino and then in Flamenco mode is to be persuaded that Yasmin Levy and her musicians represent a truly remarkable musical talent. At one level they invite us to ponder the possibility of re-creating in our time in one country a new Golden Age of co-existence of multiple languages, faiths and cultures, whilst at another very practical level –that of the classroom teacher of Spanish– they offer exciting support for the exploration of the immensely rich world of medieval Spanish culture.

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