

Ladino Music Group Aljashu Debuts in Boston



Yesterday, I had the privilege of attending the debut concert of Aljashu, a group formed by vocalist Julia Madeson to perform songs sung in the Ladino language, a combination of Hebrew and Spanish spoken (and sung) by Jews in Spain and

Portugal before the Spanish Inquisition, which began in 1492.

The group's name derives from a Turkish-Jewish Passover dessert of matzoh (unleavened bread) piled with dried fruits and nuts, drizzled with honey. With this metaphor of an often afflicted past wherein Jewish populations have been forced out of various places over their history while adopting sweet and savory local gifts, Madeson writes in the program notes, the group hopes to bring Ladino's modal infused music to a wide audience.

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photo credit Adeline Goldminc-Tronzo;

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Yesterday's concert, at the Berkeley College of Music, featured songs and music several centuries old; modern compositions by the late Judy Frankel; and instruments played by students and graduates of the Berkeley Guitar Department, where Ms. Madeson is employed.

The music—which sounded like yiddish or kletzmer melodies at some points—like Latin or flamenco at others, and quite frequently, like a mix of both—was played on the Turkish oud (a lute and guitar relative), the lute-like saz, the banjo-like cumbus—manufactured only in Istanbul, and on fretted and fretless guitars. The percussion instruments represented the cajon—widely used in Spain, and the dumbek, riq and zils,

played extensively in Turkey.



Julia's operatic voice blended beautifully with the instrumental sounds of Tev Stevig, on strings, Brian O'Neill, percussion, and Berkeley students Sabi Saltiel on guitars and saz, Cagri Erdom, Jussi Reijonen, and Jean-pierre D'Alencon, on guitars, and with the voice of guest vocalist Sarah-Jane Pugh, who, with Madeson performed a lovely duet called Shaba.

The concert was performed in honor of Chanukah, the Jewish Festival of Lights. A spring concert, entitled "Everlasting Spring," is in the works.

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