

Boda: Kantigas de Novia by Ensemble Saltiel with Booklet

Introduction by Judith Cohen

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Reviewed by Fuat Andic

A lovely collection of songs sung in Ladino makes this CD a must in a collector's library.

When, in 1492, the Jews were expelled from the Iberian Peninsula, many found refuge in Ottoman lands. This refuge was an extraordinary one, for the refugees were able to transplant their language, customs, traditions, music and literature, in one word their culture, to the cities in which they resettled. They succeeded in keeping all their cultural characteristics in their second home.

When Jews moved to the East and settled in the Ottoman cities of Istanbul, Izmir, Salonika and others, they had brought with them the medieval songs and romances of the Iberian Peninsula. These tunes, as explained in the write-up in the CD, changed gradually but surely over time, acquiring Turkish-Ottoman characteristics as their dominant form; thereby the song genre of the Jewish tradition was altered. Twenty-one wedding songs the CD contains are a clear example of this transformation. Only a trained ear can trace the remnant melodies of the medieval romances, but they are evident particularly in Band 21.

Practically all songs in the CD have a beat of 7/8 or 8/9. They are very happy beats. The form again is Turkish-Ottoman, in the form of one *maqam* or another. Skillfully executed *taqsims* (improvisations on solo instruments) are as delightful as the songs themselves. There are four such improvisations; the ones executed on the *oud* are especially beautiful. The songs are mostly happy; they are sung in Ladino with clear diction. Most of the songs were sung within the Saltiel family and collected by Aron Saltiel himself, who is not only a premiere performer, but also the "collector and documentarian."

The geographical origin of the songs is varied. Some eleven songs are from Istanbul (for example, *Mira novia, Todo los que vos kero; A sinyora novia*); Izmir and Edirne (for example, *Los de la novia komen kayimakes, Kon vuestra lesensia madre buena*); three from Salonika (for example *Madre la mi madre si bien me keresh*) and the remainder is from Bulgaria, Jerusalem and Sarajevo.

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The ensemble that plays these wedding songs is indeed large. Weddings were long, complex affairs, each step of the wedding accompanied by songs often sung or led by a specialist. Half a dozen singers with wonderful voices are accompanied by *oud*, *qanun*, clarinet, cello and percussion instruments, making one relive such weddings. The songs they sing refer to love (romantic), courtship and marriage (happiness) or complain about in-laws (mockingly sarcastic).

This is a CD that would elate your spirit, help you remember yesteryear, and give you the opportunity to brush up your Ladino. If you have difficulty in Ladino, you can also read in the pages of the CD booklet the English, Turkish and German versions of the songs.

The CD is available from the website www.alikobeni.com.