

MUSIC OF MANY WORLDS

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



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

SUNDAY, MAY 22, 2022 • 4:00 PM

PRESENTED BY

THE NEW AMSTERDAM HISTORY CENTER

CONGREGATION SHEARITH ISRAEL

NEW YORK, NY

Program

Hamesiach	Abraham de Caçeres (c. 1718-1738)
Hamesiach	Cristiano Giuseppe Lidarti (1730-1795)
Le-el Elim	Caçeres
Kaddish	Aramaic prayer (Melody, 4th aria of Le-el Elim)
Azamer Shir	M. Mani
Kol HaNeshama	Anonymous (Arr. Jonathan Salamon)
Kol HaNeshama	Lidarti
Bo'iy Be-Shalom	Lidarti
Aria d'Ester, from <i>Ester</i> (1774)	Lidarti

Performers

James M. Brown, *countertenor*
Jack Lindberg, *countertenor*
Amelia Sie, *baroque violin*
Vivian Mayers, *baroque violin*
Charlie Reed, *baroque cello*
Jonathan Salamon, *harpsichord*

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—all 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 long-suppressed Jewish faith. 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 the school 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 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 these notable 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 renowned 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 Music

The first two composers on the program, who each wrote somber devotional pieces titled *Hamesiach*, 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 undoubtedly 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 *Hamesiach* 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 singers and basso continuo. *Le-el Elim* is written in a courtly Italianate manner called the galant style, a 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). 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 significant impression on the community. Indeed, *Le-el Elim* is an exciting, multi-faceted piece and is surely Caçeres' finest surviving 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 Shir 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. Shabbat Nachamu was also an important festive occasion for the community, marking the inauguration of the Esnoga in 1675. 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 *Kol HaNeshama* 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 150:6, 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. *Kol HaNeshama* 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, *Kol HaNeshama* and *Bo'iy Be-Shalom*, are in a similar style. They feature independent violin parts, unlike the *Hamesiach* by both Caçeres and Lidarti. The latter movements of *Kol HaNeshama* 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 considerable importance, yet hardly studied and rarely heard. The Hebrew libretto by Rabbi Jacob Raphael Saraval is derived from the same source as Handel's more famous English-language *Esther* oratorio from 1732. In this aria, Esther wonders 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 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

Texts and Translations

Hamesiach

Caçeres, C.G. Lidarti

He who gives voice to the mute,
And the one who deciphers secrets:
We give thanks to you alone.

Le-el Elim (*To God Almighty*)

Caçeres

Text: Moshe Chaim Luzzatto, trans. Israel Adler

1. In praise of God
To mighty God, oh sons of God,
In chorus raise your song
In common counsel give your thanks
To His Holiness and Law.

2. To His people Israel
On this auspicious day of gladness
God gladdens His people's flock,
He leads them in His face's light
To be praised in his praise.

3. To the "Torah Bridegroom"
In peace He will complete it wholly,
Complete our God's Torah,
Will radiate, shine in His sun's light,
Will shine, flourish before our eyes.

4. To the Congregation
On all of you, to your heart's content,
God will bestow His blessing,
Will make you fruitful, multiply,
Return you to His land.

5. To the "Genesis Bridegroom"
In all His splendor shines today
He who begins our God's Torah,
Days many as sand, sons as many as sand
He will see before our eyes.

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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 Shir (*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.

Kol HaNeshama (*All who rejoice*), Psalm 150:6 Anonymous

Let every soul praise the Lord, hallelujah.

Kol HaNeshama (*All who rejoice*) Lidarti

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

Bo'iy Be-Shalom (*Come in peace*) Lidarti

Text: "Lekha Dodi," Shelomo (HaLevi) Alkabetz

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!

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.

Performers' Biographies

James M. Brown, *countertenor* | James M. Brown [they/them], a Maine native and artist known for diverse repertoire, “remains a definite asset in a cast as they sing and play remarkably well” (atuvu.ca). They returned to The Oratorio Society of Richmond in Handel’s *Susanna* and later this year will premiere Niccolo Seligmann’s *Julie, Monster* with RVA Baroque. During the closures due to COVID-19 they have found a place in Barn Opera’s Social Distance Opera while narrating Bel Cantanti Opera’s video production of *Hansel & Gretel*. This summer, pursuing their love of new works, James performed works by John Cage, Joshua Scheid, and premiered Danni Song’s *Brood X* at the Institute for Contemporary Performance Practice. As a recitalist, James was a featured artist in the Apple Tree Art Song Pride Concert Series and will be an Encore Young Artist with Ars Musica Chorale for the 2021-2022 season. Mx. Brown holds degrees from McGill University and the University of Southern Maine.
www.countertenorjames.com

Jack Lindberg, *countertenor* | New York based countertenor Jack Lindberg holds degrees from the Guildhall School and Yale University. His previous operatic credits include Ottone in Handel's *Agrippina* at the Dartington Festival, Spirit & Sorceress in *Dido & Aeneas* at Guildhall, and the title role of Cavalli's *Xerse* with the Yale Baroque Opera Project. A proponent of living composers, he premiered several new works including the role of The Attache, Abel Esbenschade's chamber opera *I'm Cleaning, I'm Cleaning*, Amy Crankshaw's *Blotting Paper* for countertenor and wind quintet at the Barbican Center, and Mark Bowler's song cycle *Pentaplex* (commissioned for the Leeds Lieder Festival). He is also an advocate for Jewish vocal music, having performed as a soloist with Hazamir, the Great Portland Street Synagogue Choir (London), and at the North America Jewish Choral Festival. He has studied with countertenors Andrew Watts, Nicholas Clapton, and Jeffrey Gall and is currently a student of Claudia Friedlander.

Amelia Sie, *baroque violin* | Based in New York City, Amelia Sie is a virtuosic and adventurous performer of modern and Baroque violin. She received her Bachelor's and Master's degrees in Violin Performance from New England Conservatory, where she studied with Paul Biss, Miriam Fried, and Soovin Kim. She is currently studying at The Juilliard School, where she is pursuing a Master's degree in Historical Performance. In her spare time, Amelia can be found playing Wordle and bothering her cat.

Vivian Mayers, *baroque violin* | Violinist Vivian Mayers specializes in the performance of early music. She is currently working toward a M.M. in Historical Performance from The Juilliard School, where she studies with Cynthia Roberts and Elizabeth Blumenstock. She has recently appeared with the Valley of the Moon Music Festival, the Elm City Consort, and the Yale Baroque Opera Project. She performs regularly with Juilliard's period orchestra, Juilliard415. Ms. Mayers is a dedicated teacher and is certified in Suzuki violin pedagogy. She graduated *cum laude* from Yale University in 2021 with a B.A. in History.

Charlie Reed, *baroque cello* | Charlie Reed (b. 1993) is a multi-instrumentalist active in baroque and modern cello as well as viola da gamba. He has collaborated with distinguished musicians such as Catherina Meints, Mark Edwards, Myriam Rignol, and Thomas Dunford, and with ensembles such as Les Arts Florissants and Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra. As a part of Juilliard415 he has collaborated with conductors such as Rachel Podger, Masaaki Suzuki, Richard Egarr, Kris Bezuidenhout, Nicolas McGegan, and Robert Mealy. In 2019 he made his oratorio debut performing an obbligato gamba solo in Telemann's *Der Tag des Gerichts* under Suzuki. Currently, he is focusing on historical improvisation and composition as a member of Nuova Pratica, a New York-based group of historical composers and performers. Charlie recently finished a Masters at the Juilliard School as the school's first double major in gamba and baroque cello, studying with Sarah Cunningham and Phoebe Carrai. He also holds modern cello degrees from the Eastman School of Music, where he was awarded the prestigious Performer's Certificate, and Oberlin Conservatory. His past mentors have also included Steven Doane, Christel Thielemann, Amir Eldan, and Cathy Meints.

Jonathan Salamon, *harpsichord* | Jonathan Salamon is a harpsichordist, fortepianist, and composer based in New York City. A prizewinner at the 2019 Mathieu Duguay Early Music Competition in Lamèque, Canada, he has performed and presented scholarship at festivals and academic conferences in the U.S. and abroad. Jonathan is the Principal Harpsichordist with the Chamber Orchestra of New York and recently made his debut at Carnegie Weill Hall as a soloist with the Orchestra, performing J.S. Bach's first harpsichord concerto. Jonathan completed his undergraduate studies at NYU in Piano Performance and holds a Master of Music degree in Harpsichord Performance from the Yale School of Music. He was a 2020-2021 Fulbright Scholar in Amsterdam and is currently a Doctor of Musical Arts candidate at Yale.

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