

# **La Rosa Enflorese – Los Biblicos – and Andalusian Music**

The Rose Blossom - “La Rosa Enflorese”, or “Los Biblicos” - is one of the most frequently recorded Sephardic songs. Its haunting medieval melody is found in many other settings – like the ethnic dance “Hashoshana Porachat”, a table song “Tzur Mishelo” marking the Sabbath’s end, or Mimi and Richard Farina’s 1960s tune “The Swallow Song”. The original version is in Ladino, the Spanish dialect spoken by the Jews who lived in Spain until they were expelled 1492. Ladino bears the same relation to Spanish as Yiddish does to German – an old form of the parent language with a variable admixture of Hebrew.

## **La Rosa Enflorese (Los Biblicos) - a 15<sup>th</sup> century Sephardic love song**

### **La rosa enflorese**

The rose bush blossoms

### **En el mes de mai**

In the month of May.

### **Mi neshama s’escurese**

My soul feels only darkness,

### **Sufriendo del amor.**

The anguish of my love.

### **Mas presto ven, palomba**

Ah, hurry little dove

### **Mas presto ven con mi**

Hurry and come to me

### **Mas presto ven guerida,**

Come close my love

### **Corre y salva me.**

Come fast to my rescue.

### **Los biblicos cantan**

The nightingales sing

### **Con sospiros de amor**

Their gentle sighs of love

### **Mi neshama, mi ventura**

My soul, my very being,

### **Estan en tu poder.**

So helpless in your spell.

### **Los biblicos cantan**

The nightingales sing

### **En los arbos de la flor**

High among the flowering trees

### **De basho se a sentan**

While those resting in their shadow

### **Los que sufren del amor.**

Know only of loves pain.

Most of Spain throughout the Middle Ages was called “Al Andalus”. After occupying the Iberian Peninsula in 711, the Arabs developed a centralized, bureaucratic government. Arabs and Berbers migrated there in large numbers during this time, living alongside Christians and Jews. Jews had lived in the region since Roman times (“Sephardic” is derived from the Hebrew word for Spain, “Sepharad”). In 589, Christianity had been declared the official state religion by the Romans successors - the ruling western Goths. Given a choice of conversion to Christianity or death, thousands of Jews fled the Iberian Peninsula. Those who remained behind viewed the Arab conquest a century later more as liberation than threat. In the Muslim state, they had the opportunity to rise to high positions in the government and administration.

Jewish and Arab musicians played together at the Castilian courts through the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Arabic Spain developed into a highly cultivated civilization known for its diversity, tolerance, and artistic and scientific advancement. This was a time when cultural achievement in the rest of what is today known as Europe lagged well behind many parts of the Arab-Islamic world.

The unique culture of Al Andalus lasted nearly 800 years, ending with the Catholic “reconquista” (re-conquest) which began to take hold in the 13th century and was completed in 1492 with the defeat of Granada, the last Arab stronghold. In the following years, Arabs and Jews were expelled en masse; many relocated to North Africa and elsewhere in the Mediterranean basin, taking with them their musical traditions. Living musical history from this time period can still be found in such diverse places as Algeria, Albania, Morocco, Turkey, and Lebanon, in the form of classical Arab-Andalusian music and poetry and Sephardic songs and liturgical chants - often very close to their original forms. This once flourishing Arab civilization left behind a lasting mark, as ornate mosques and palaces, but also in musical forms, structures and instruments. The Oriental stringed oud, for example, considered the ancestor of the modern Spanish guitar. Spanish musicians today explore the roots of their country's rich cultural heritage, and artists from outside of Spain look back to a country their ancestors once called home.

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** These notes are loosely based on an article by Elena M. Villa, a doctoral candidate at the University of Oregon, where she teaches Comparative Literature. The full article in its original form was published in **Harrakat**, the newsletter of the Middle Eastern Dance Guild of Eugene, in November 2003.