

breakers

A Sephardic Siren Is Set to Entrance At LBI Foundation

Sarah Aroeste a Ladino, Not Latino, Queen

Sarah Aroeste may be the reigning queen of Ladino music in America.

Ladies and gentlemen, we know what you're thinking – how did the copy editor miss that one? The writer surely meant Latino music.

No, Ladino would indeed be correct.

OK, we know what you're thinking again – what the hell is Ladino music?

Well, it's sort of related to Latino music, in the Mediterranean sense of Latin. This is getting complicated, isn't it? Perhaps a short history lesson is in order.

In 1492 Columbus, of course, sailed the ocean blue. That same busy year the very king who financed his voyage, Ferdinand II, also expelled all Jews from Spain.

The displaced Jews mainly settled along the Mediterranean coast and North Africa. They originally spoke medieval Castilian Spanish but over the centuries developed a slang that also borrowed vocabulary from Hebrew and from the Greeks, Turks, Italians, French and Portuguese. Think Yiddish – a Germanic language

written in the Hebrew alphabet that gradually picked up many words of Slavic origin. Ladino is a sort of Southern European equivalent.

Just as the Ashkenazi Jews simultaneously developed their own genre of music – klezmer – while evolving Yiddish, the Ladino speaking Sephardic Jews gradually created a rich music of their own. It was based on Spanish rhythms and then, over the centuries, layered with the native nuances of countries such as Turkey and Greece. The result is a much more romantic sound than klezmer (oh, those hot-blooded Mediterranean types).

Aroeste has taken yet another step. She has strong Ladino roots, with her ancestors originally calling Spain home and then emigrating to Greece. But her grandparents eventually crossed the Atlantic and the singer was born in the USA. Although she wants to pay homage to her heritage, she also wants to make the traditional music palatable to young Americans. So she mixes in New World elements. Here's what *The Jewish Week* of Greater New York said about her show back in 2003:

"With a bare midriff and gyrating



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ECLECTIC, ELECTRIC: The Sarah Aroeste Band blends the old and the new – and could very well be the future.

hips, Sarah Aroeste performs jazz and rock blended into favorites from her Sephardic repertoire. ... 'I'm not trying to promote sexy visions,' Aroeste, a classically trained vocalist, said. 'But the music is incredibly romantic and intoxicating.' Romantic and intoxicating? 'Jewish music' usually brings to mind melodies either liturgical or lively, but not exactly

sexy. Ladino music is 'alluring and sensual and can be appreciated in that way,' said Aroeste.

The Princeton-raised Yale graduate decided to make a crossover Ladino CD (she now has two under her belt) after hearing klezmer musicians who were making their own attempt to stretch their musical wings. Folks like John Zorn and Frank London

were performing music that Aroeste said "was primarily klezmer, but not exclusive to it." That got her to thinking.

Most people working in Ladino, she told *The Jewish Week*, were "either people considerably older, or they are only performing in very traditional folk style." Aroeste instead wanted to "create a style that I felt could represent me and that my peers could also relate to."

What a mix it is! On her CDs you can hear her band playing instruments such as the oud (a Middle Eastern form of lute), darbuka (a goblet shaped hand drum) and riqq (a tambourine popular in Arabic music) as well as electric guitars and electronic drums. Perfect, really, for a woman whose last name means "from the west."

"I see what I'm doing as preserving the culture for a new generation," she told *The Jewish Week* when asked if the criticism of Ladino conservatives might upset her.

Forget the conservative critics. Let's see what "hipper" publications said about Aroeste and her band:

"Ethnic eclecticism from a sultry warbler of Greek ancestry," said the *Village Voice*. "The next time you find yourself picking between New York's eclectic offerings, find a show by Sarah Aroeste," said the *New York Blueprint*. "A fine and promising debut release by a young American singer exploring Sephardic music in the modern world," offered *CD ROOTS.com*.

Eclectic seems to be a key word of the reviews, doesn't it? That's all right – the Jewish Community Center of Long Beach Island is becoming accustomed to sponsoring eclectic concerts. Last year the center hosted a concert by Joshua Nelson, the sensational creator of "Kosher Gospel" – let's face it, you can't get much more eclectic than that. But Aroeste, it seems, is going to try.

Why, just look at the lineup of the Sarah Aroeste Band. As the name implies, it features Aroeste, who trained

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as a classical musician for 10 years and performed at such renowned venues as the Tanglewood Music Festival and the Israel Vocal Arts Institute. Then there's acoustic guitarist and pianist Yoel Ben-Simhon, who has an MFA in music composition from Hunter College. Electric guitarist Yaron Eilam was born in Israel, as was percussionist Liron Peled and Spanish guitarist Dan Nadel. Bass player Emmanuel Mann, on the other hand, was born in France and split his time since between Israel and New York. In other words, a truly international cast.

Last summer's show by Nelson was nothing short of amazing. If the Sarah Aroeste Band is anywhere near as good the crowd is in for an electric (forget eclectic) evening.

Sarah Aroeste and her band will perform on Sunday, June 24 at 7 p.m. at the Long Beach

Island Foundation for the Arts and Sciences located at 120 Long Beach Blvd. in Loveladies. Call the Jewish Community Center at 492-4090 to purchase tickets.

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