

Summary of Oral Interview with Ariel Carciente RG-50.647.0026

Ariel Carciente is a historian, performer, and interpreter of musical traditions transmitted by Jews from North Africa. Born in Casablanca in 1951 he now lives in Jerusalem. He discusses his family background and how he became interested in music. His mother was born in Switzerland in 1911 and his father in Casablanca in 1904. They met in Switzerland. After traveling to France and Algeria, his mother went to Morocco, where with the help of synagogue *Eretz Israel* and the Rabbi, she met other people and became a social worker. His father was a businessman who contributed extensively to his community and was among Jews exiled from Spain after the expulsion. They brought their music with them from Andalousia.

Ariel Carciente discusses the cultural importance of the concept “city” — the Medina— in Middle-Eastern societies as compared to Europe. His grandfather was from the Tetuan region of Morocco. Jews who wanted to engage in commerce had to leave their wife and children as collateral. His grandfather’s family left in 1890 and went to Casablanca, where the Moslem authorities protected them. The family lived in Casablanca until 1978. Ariel has three children, a brother, and a sister. His brother is a doctor in New York.

He has always been interested in music, especially from Andalousia. Ariel discusses the use of a chorus and organ in the Casablanca synagogue, as well as marriage traditions and how the service was sung. He studied in Morocco and had a Jewish and French education. He passed his baccalaureate exam in Morocco and frequently travelled between Algeria and France, completing his military service in France. He left Morocco in 1978 and went to Israel. He originally studied for the rabbinate but did not complete the studies. However, he learned tunes at various synagogues, especially those used by Jews from Algeria. In Jerusalem, he performed prayers from the Algerian tradition on the radio. These performances became very popular since the music was new. To expose more people to this music, he brought back records from France whenever he could and played them in Jerusalem.

He discusses Arab Muslim music from Spain as distinct from the musical traditions of Algerian Jews. Melodies and texts varied, depending on the region, such as Andalousian music of Spanish origin and the Maghreb region. In Arab countries, music and singing were alternately banned or permitted, depending on who was in charge. Jews were important in reconstituting and preserving this music. Under the Taliban, for example, music was not allowed until they were defeated. Most of the music in Baghdad was Jewish and when Jews left, the music went with them. There was much cross-cultural influence between Arabs and Jews in preserving this music, as well as the influence of troubadours. Spanish, Italian, Arabic, Hebrew, and Latin texts and melodies also enriched these traditions.

In 1993, an Andalousian orchestra in Ashdod, Israel played to an audience of 2000 people, and also performed in other Israeli cities. This is a professional orchestra. Ariel Carciente works with the Minister of Education to bring this tradition to schools and mentions other

orchestras and their directors who perform traditional Andalousian music. There is also the Maghreb Orchestra that plays only Algerian music. He was raised where Jews, Moslems, and Christians had their own traditions, respected each other, but didn't mingle. But now this is different and there is more cross-cultural influence musically. More Israelis are interested in traveling to Morocco, increasing contacts between the two countries. Also, the internet makes it easier to present radio programs, an area in which he is involved. He also mentions the *genizah* in Cairo which contains old texts and notations and is a valuable source of information. He discusses the contacts made via trade routes, citing the influence of Mali and the Sudan. Nomadic Jews travelled with other tribes for protection and even took the name of the tribe. They didn't convert, but were part of the group, and even organized caravans. He speculates on Jews who were shepherds in biblical times and perhaps invented musical instruments in the Middle East.

Ariel Carciente discusses and shows numerous books on Jewish and Arabic musical traditions, including many musical scores and recordings. He works with the *Worldwide North Africa Jewish Heritage Center in Jerusalem (Le Centre Mondial pour la préservation du patrimoine des Juifs originaires de l'Afrique du nord)*, built with materials and authentic décor from Morocco, using local and foreign funds. It is an important museum that includes exhibits, films, musical performances, and lectures. He collaborates with the museum in many ways to spread information about the rich musical traditions of Jews from North Africa.

Translated by: Felicia Berger Sturzer