

The Sarajevo Haggadah: Music of the Book

Merima Ključo, composer and accordion

Seth Knopp, piano

Bart Woodstrup, artist

Program Notes

The Sarajevo Haggadah: Music of the Book is in twelve movements, which together tell the story of the Haggadah's journey from its birth in 14th-century Spain through five centuries of near-destruction and survival at the hands of many peoples and cultures, from the "Edict of Expulsion" of 1492 to the Siege of Sarajevo of 1992. Today the Haggadah is included in the collection of the National Museum of Bosnia Herzegovina. [Haggadah is the Hebrew word for "telling" and refers to the text recited on the first nights of the Jewish Passover, including the story of the Exodus.]

The Creation:

La Convivencia (The Coexistence)

Now considered to be an idealized recasting of history, "La Convivencia" spanned four centuries in a Medieval Spain under Moorish rule, where peace and cultural interaction existed between Jews, Muslims, and Christians.

Al Mora

A special place in the Sarajevo Haggadah's depiction of the Seder table is reserved for a Moorish woman, who appears seated in a saffron-colored robe. She seems to represent a cultural interaction that certainly existed in 14th century Spanish Catalonia, at the time the Sarajevo Haggadah was created.

Alhambra Decree

Also known as "The Edict of Expulsion", the Alhambra Decree was issued in 1492 by the Spanish monarchs Ferdinand and Isabelle and ordered "Jews and Jewesses of our kingdoms to depart and never to return or come back to them or to any of them... and they shall not dare to return to those places, nor to reside in them, nor to live in any part of them, neither temporarily on the way to somewhere else nor in any other manner, under pain that if they do not perform and comply with this command and should be found in our said kingdom and lordships and should in any manner live in them, they incur the penalty of death and the confiscation of all their possessions by our Chamber of Finance, incurring these penalties by the act itself, without further trial, sentence, or declaration."

The decree was not revoked until 1968.

Exodus:

In Silenzio

Stampita Italkim

"Stampita" is a medieval dance and musical form. "Italkim" is the Hebrew word for "Italians" and refers to a specific community of Jews (also known as "Bené Roma", or "Children of Rome") that have lived in Rome for over 2000 years.

Thus, this movement is a tipsy Stampita shared by two Italkim.

The Inquisitor

Most likely smuggled out of Spain after the Alhambra Decree of 1492, the Sarajevo Haggadah resurfaces in 1609 in Venice. Here, Jews are allowed to live but confined to the ghetto of Cannaregio and prohibited from printing books. Indeed, all books are subject to inspection by the Inquisition and those considered a threat to the teachings of the Church, burned. This movement is devoted to the priest for the Inquisition who evidently allowed the Sarajevo Haggadah to be spared. His notation appears inside the Haggadah: "Revisto per me", or "Revised by me", and signed Giovanni Dom. Vistorini.

Sarajevo 1941:

Derviš Korkut

Hitler wished to establish a "museum of an extinct race" that would house artifacts like the Sarajevo Haggadah. Derviš Korkut, the chief librarian at the Bosnian National Museum, had the foresight to understand that the Haggadah was threatened and when the Nazi commander Johann Fortner arrived at the museum to claim the Haggadah, Korkut hid it underneath his coat so that it would not be found when the museum was searched. Quietly leaving the museum, Korkut entrusted the Haggadah to a Muslim imam who hid it in his mosque's library until after the war.

Siege of Sarajevo

The "Siege of Sarajevo" began on April 6, 1992. Under constant fire, the inhabitants of the Bosnian capital were cut off from food, medicine, water and electricity. Thousands were killed and wounded. The Siege lasted for nearly four years. It had become one of the most dramatic and emblematic events of the violent breakup of the former Yugoslavia and had left an estimated 200,000 people killed and 2.7 million displaced as refugees – the largest displacement in Europe since the Second World War. The people of Bosnia and Herzegovina were witness to almost unimaginable violations of human rights and abuse in the name of ethnic cleansing, ranging from rape to mass executions and starvation.

La Bendicion de Madre (The Mother's Prayer)

This prayer was especially intended to be used by elderly Jewish women who never had the opportunity to study Hebrew, and who considered Ladino (a language derived from Old Spanish and spoken predominantly by Sephardic minorities) to be their Jewish language.