

Lesson 8: Sephardic and Middle Eastern Jewish Music

Aim

Piyut/Piyutim פיוטים, פיוט פיוט Jewish liturgical poems, have been composed across the Jewish diaspora, particularly in Spain and the Middle East. These religious poems were sung during Shabbat, weddings, and holidays and were used to inspire Jewish communities with a love the Torah, hope for a time of redemption and to instill faith in God. Students will recognize some *piyutim* and learn how they were sung years ago and how they continue to play an integral role in Mizrahi music in Israel.

Objectives

- Students will learn about *piyutim* - Sephardic Jewish liturgical poems.
- Students will read and analyze the text of a *piyut*.
- Students will draw connections between *piyutim* and modern Israeli/Mizrachi music.
- Students will sing *piyutim*.

Materials

- Whiteboard and markers
- Links to *piyutim* recordings
- computer with good sound system
- [Appendix A](#) - Piyut: *Lecha Dodi*
- [Appendix B](#) - Piyut: *Yismach Hatani*
- [Appendix C](#) - Note to Teacher (background information on *piyutim*)

Procedures

Introduction

1. **WRITE** the Main Questions on the board:
 - a. What are the roots of Middle Eastern Jewish music?
 - b. How did this music become popular in Israel and beyond?
2. To begin today's lesson on Sephardic and Mizrahi music, students will participate in a listening exercise.
3. **HAND OUT** Appendix A. Allow the students to read through the information about the 1st piyut, *Lecha Dodi*, and answer the questions in the worksheet. Discuss the responses with students.
4. **PLAY MUSIC**. Listen to this version of *Lecha Dodi* (Click [here](#)) performed by the Israeli Andalusian Orchestra - Ashdod.
5. **DISCUSS**:
 - a. Do you recognize this music? Does it sound familiar to you?
 - b. What does it sound like?
 - c. What do you feel when you hear this music?
 - d. What instruments do you hear?
 - e. Why would a modern orchestra in Israel want to retain these *piyutim* in contemporary Israeli culture?

NOTE TO TEACHER: If you taught Lesson 7, you can connect it to why it's important to pass on heirlooms and keepsakes? How is a *piyut* like a keepsake?)

Body of Lesson

6. **HAND OUT** Appendix B.
7. The students will follow a similar exercise to the one presented in the introduction.
 - a. Students will **REVIEW THE LYRICS** of *Yismach Hatani* and **ANSWER THE QUESTIONS**

8. After a discussion about the lyrics, **PLAY** two renditions of the song.
 - The **first rendition** (Click [here](#)) represents a traditional version that would be chanted in a synagogue.
 - The **second rendition** (Click [here](#)) demonstrates how Israeli-Mizrachi Jews have incorporated these *piyutim* in contemporary Israeli culture

NOTE TO TEACHER:

Sarit Hadad, famous Mizrahi singer was born in Afula to Caucasian Jewish parents and has strengthened the role of women in the Sephardic and Mizrahi music world.

Her rendition of *Yismach Hatani* was made for the Israeli movie with the same name.

If you would like students to watch the video after listening to the two first renditions of this song you can do so. This music demonstrates Sarit Hadad singing and many others dancing with her.

9. Students **ANSWER THE QUESTIONS** in [Appendix B](#) and **DISCUSS**.

Conclusion

10. As a group, **LEARN THE SONG** *Yismach Hatani*, **SING AND DANCE** together as a group *or* choose one of the extension activities to summarize the lesson).

Extension Activities

11. Students research the Mizrahi music genre, its emergence and development in Israeli culture. Explore the rich music of contemporary Israeli Mizrahi singers.
12. Students become DJs. Teams of students create a playlist of Mizrahi music, presenting the background of each musical artist to the class.
13. Students research the verses in *piyutim*, locating their sources in Jewish texts and prayer books.
14. Who wrote Piyutim? By looking at the composers of the *piyutim*, one can learn which *hachamim* (renowned Jewish leaders) wrote these liturgical poems. The

composers of various *piyutim* usually used an *acrostic* format. Since prayer books were limited at the time, many piyutim have repeating stanzas that the congregation would respond to followed by the cantor's recitations.

Resources and External Links

Piyut North America

From <http://piyutnorthamerica.org>

An Invitation to Piyut

From <http://old.piyut.org.il/chosen12/english/>

West Side Sephardic Synagogue

From <http://www.wsssynagogue.com/sephardic-piyut.html>

The National Library of Israel

From <http://web.nli.org.il/sites/NLIS/he/song/Pages/default.aspx>

Mizrahi Music Gets Its Rock Star Moment

From <https://forward.com/culture/music/325432/why-mizrahi-artists-are-embracing-their-ancestors-languages/>

The Mizrahi canon: Top classics from the margins of Israeli society

From <https://972mag.com/the-mizrahi-canon-classics-from-margins-of-israeli-society/68857/>

Between Arab and Maghreb

From <https://www.andalusit.co.il/Between-Arab-and-Maghreb>