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Anthology of Music Traditions in Israel 22 אנתולוגיה של מסורות מוסיקה בישראל

זרמים יהודיים מהים הקריבי

Judeo-Caribbean Currents

המוסיקה של בית הכנסת "מקווה ישראל-עמנואל" מקורסאו
Music of the Mikvé Israel-Emanuel Synagogue in Curaçao



The Hebrew University of Jerusalem
The Center for Research on Dutch Jewry
The Jewish Music Research Centre



האוניברסיטה העברית בירושלים
המרכז לחקר יהדות הולנד
מרכז לחקר המוסיקה היהודית

Anthology of Music Traditions in Israel • 22

Edited by Edwin Seroussi in collaboration with Yuval Shaked

Judeo-Caribbean Currents

Music of the Mikvé Israel-Emanuel Synagogue in Curaçao

Gideon Y. Zelermyer (hazzan) and Raymond Goldstein (piano)

Arrangements by Raymond Goldstein

Vocal ensemble: Naama Nazarathy (soprano), Shelley Berlinsky (alto),
Evan Cohen (tenor), Jay Shir (bass)

Commentaries by Edwin Seroussi

Jerusalem, 2009

The Center for Research on Dutch Jewry, The Jewish Music Research Centre
The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

The Hebrew University of Jerusalem • Faculty of Humanities
The Center for Research on Dutch Jewry
and the Jewish Music Research Centre
In collaboration with the **National Library of Israel**

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Preface

This CD and its accompanying book originate from a fortuitous encounter between composer, arranger and pianist Raymond Goldstein and Dr. Joel Fishman, Chairman of the Center for the Research on Dutch Jewry at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Goldstein reported to Fishman that he had met a gifted new cantorial student, Gideon Zelermyer, who had come from the USA to study at the Tel Aviv Cantorial Institute. Gideon's mother, Heske (née Levisson), was a Jew from Curaçao, a Caribbean island in the Dutch Antilles, who immigrated to the USA via Holland. Goldstein had heard from Zelermyer about the possible musical treasures found in the archives of his mother's community, the United Netherlands-Portuguese Congregation, Mikvé Israel-Emanuel.

Knowing the long historical background of this Jewish congregation of the Dutch Antilles and upon hearing the report from Goldstein, the Center for the Research on Dutch Jewry decided to support a research project dedicated to retrieve, edit, perform, record and publish some of these musical materials. Initial funds to finance this effort were raised from the Schussheim Foundation in Haifa, and by three donors from Curaçao: Ethel Krijt (née Capriles) who was actively interested in this project, an anonymous donor and from the Zelermyer family, allowing Zelermyer and Goldstein to fly to Curaçao in the year 2000. On their arrival in Curaçao, they uncovered in the synagogue archives a music collection

of very diverse styles reflecting the unique social and religious transformations of this more than 350 year old Jewish community.

Rabbi Michael Tayvah, at that time the officiating clergy at Mikvé Israel – Emanuel, together with Mr. Rene D.L. Maduro, then president of the Snoa and the Directiva (Board) of the Congregation, agreed to assist with this project. Mrs. Ena Maduro Dankmeijer of the Mongui Maduro Library opened the doors of her unique archives for Zelermyer and Goldstein. Rabbi Tayvah and his staff retrieved the musical documents from the archives and brought them to the area where Goldstein and Zelermyer worked. The librarian, Rose-Marie de Paula, assisted in recording the material that was photocopied.

Goldstein and Zelermyer sorted out the original scores (part books, solo parts, various full scores for cantor and SATB choir, organ music, etc) and selected the retrievable materials. Later on, Goldstein arranged a selection of pieces for voice and piano and with Zelermyer they began recording them in Montreal, where Zelermyer presently officiates as cantor at the Shaar Hashomayim Congregation in West Mount.

In 2004, the Jewish Music Research Centre joined forces with the Center for the Research on Dutch Jewry in order to complete the research on the Curaçaoan Jewish tradition. A long process of research started, amid the production of this CD with a selection of the music from the Mikvé Israel-Emanuel synagogue in Curaçao together with the editing of the scores.

Many individuals and institutions assisted in the realization of this project. None other than Rabbi Gerald Zelermyer and his wife Heske, the parents of cantor Gideon Zelermyer, occupied the incumbent position of Rabbi and Rebbitzin at Curaçao's Mikvé Israel-Emanuel from 2002 until 2005, and offered continuous support for this endeavor. This project owes much gratitude to them as well as to the indefatigable Ethel Krijt for all her help and encouragement. We are grateful also to the recording engineer from Montreal, Sacha Milovanovich, for his contribution toward the success of this production. The Shaare Zion Congregation of Montreal graciously provided the use of its sanctuary with its beautiful concert acoustics. Thanks go also to Irving Eklove z"l from Canada, for defraying the costs of the Yamaha Concert Grand Piano used in Montreal for this recording, in a much appreciated gesture made in memory of his wife. Rabbi Philip J. Bentley was gracious enough to share with me precious information about liturgical music during his tenure in Curaçao in the years 1975-1978. In 2006, some choral pieces from the Curaçao repertoire were recorded in Jerusalem at "Studio One". We thank Leo Doron from "Studio One" for his contribution to the final editing and mastering of this recording. Finally, the successful completion of this project was made possible through the generous support of the *Stichting Afwikkeling Marorgelden Overheid* – SAMO.

In the last stages of editing the commentaries, I received the unfailing assistance of Josette Capriles Goldish from Brandeis University, a scholar on

the history of the Jews of Curaçao, who thoroughly revised an earlier draft, amended and edited it. My colleague Judah Cohen from Indiana University, an ethnomusicologist specializing among other topics on the Jewish community of Saint Thomas – US Virgin Islands, also added perceptive commentaries to the manuscript.

Last but not least, I personally thank our colleagues at the Center for Research on Dutch Jewry: Prof. Yosef Kaplan, academic chair, Dr. Joel Fishman, chairman of the board, Abraham Roet, the previous chairman, Chaja Brasz who worked in the initial stages of this project when she served as executive director, Chaim den Heijer, the last executive director of the center, and the dedicated staff of the center, Lea Menashe and Eva Ben-David.

The final editing of this CD was made in collaboration with Yuval Shaked former director of the Feher Jewish Music Center at Beth Hatefutsoth who joined me for the first time in the task of editing an album in the Anthology of Music Traditions in Israel series. I am grateful to him for enthusiastically accepting my call to collaborate on this and other projects.

Introduction

Dramatic demographic and ideological shifts characterize the three and a half century saga of the small and yet prominent United Netherlands-Portuguese Congregation Mikvé Israel-Emanuel in Curaçao. Its liturgical music is a reflection of the rich historical path followed by this unique Sephardic community in the Caribbean. Interpreting the multifaceted repertoire that emerges from the selections in this CD entails the description of some key events in the history of this community. In telling this story, several conflicting memories converge into a multilayered musical narrative.

As the oldest Jewish congregation in the Western hemisphere in continuous existence, it is understandable that, as Charles Gomes Casseres suggested, its music was perceived as being throughout the centuries “the very same that still exists to this day.” (Swerling 1997:13). Yet, as our research attests, its liturgical music lore is a compound one, reflecting diverse historical layers. Drawing on the original Portuguese synagogue music imported by cantors trained at the mother congregation in Amsterdam, the repertoire shifted dramatically through the generations while always maintaining a tie with the Portuguese tradition. The following study is a first attempt to glean from available sources the processes leading to the constitution of the musical archive searched by Goldstein and Zelermyer and its meaning in terms of the history of Curaçao’s Mikvé Israel-Emanuel synagogue as well as Jewish musical culture in general.

Historical and social background¹

The first notice of a Jewish presence in Curaçao dates back to 1651, when the Portuguese Jewish merchant from Amsterdam, Joao Ilhao (or d’Illan), founded an agricultural settlement along the northern shore of the Santa Anna Baai in Curaçao. A few years later, ten Jewish families joined Ilhao/ d’Illan in his enterprise and from that time on, a steady flow of Portuguese Jewish immigrants from Amsterdam, Brazil and elsewhere moved to the island.

The formal existence of the Congregation Mikvé Israel (“Hope of Israel”) can be traced back to 1654. By 1659, seventy Jewish souls worshipped under the leadership of Isaac da Costa from Amsterdam with a Torah Scroll provided by the mother Portuguese congregation of Amsterdam. This scroll can still be found among the eighteen scrolls belonging to the community today. A cemetery “Beit Haim Blenheim” was founded in that same year. The existence of a formal place of Jewish worship in Curaçao is recorded in 1674, within the walled city of Willemstad. In this same year the eminent Hakham (Sephardic equivalent of Rabbi) Josiao Pardo from Amsterdam arrived to become the spiritual leader of the

¹ The following historical survey draws from several primary and secondary sources: Arbell 2002; Benjamin 2003; Corcos 1897; Emmanuel 1957; Emmanuel and Emmanuel 1970; Jessurun Cardozo 1955, and Karner 1969. The official website of the United Netherlands-Portuguese Congregation, Mikvé Israel-Emanuel (<http://www.snoa.com/snoa>) was consulted too.

community. Several synagogue structures were used subsequently, and in 1703, the fifth, short lived synagogue building was established to be superseded on the eve of Passover of the Hebrew year 5492 (1732) by the newly consecrated Mikvé Israel synagogue. This is the synagogue where the descendants of these early Sephardim still meet in the twenty-first century, a majestic building that has been given the status of a national monument.

The 18th century saw the peak in the development of the original Portuguese congregation in Curaçao. A distinguished gallery of spiritual leaders from or trained in Amsterdam guided this community, such as Hakham Samuel Mendes de Sola, whose tenure started on August 19, 1750. His successor, Hakham Ishaac Carigal, arrived to Curaçao shortly after the death of Hakham de Sola in 1761 and led the community until 1764 when the native Hakham Jacob Lopes da Fonseca, who studied at the Ets Haim Academy in Amsterdam, returned to Curaçao to lead the community for fifty-two years, until his death in 1815.

Around 1800, close to 2000 Jews lived in Curaçao, comprising almost half of the white population of the island. It was the largest and wealthiest Jewish community in the Americas at the time. Its prominence is attested by the financial assistance it provided to Jewish congregations in the USA, Jamaica, Surinam, Panama, Venezuela and Colombia. By 1825 the formal legal emancipation of the Jews in Holland had occurred, leading to a swift process of integration in the social fabric of the island.

By 1830, demands for the liberalization of the ritual in the synagogue began to be voiced in a process that paralleled similar trends in other Portuguese Jewish strongholds in Europe and America. The fact that the Regulations of 1833 still mentioned that “no Rite or Liturgy other than that of the Netherlands Portuguese Community [of Amsterdam] shall be allowed” hints at these liberal undercurrents. The weakening of rabbinical authority and the forty-one years without rabbinical leadership from the end of the tenure of Hakham Lopes da Fonseca until the arrival of Hakham Aron Mendes Chumaceiro from Amsterdam (whose descendents still live on Curaçao) in 1856, also contributed to the advancement of the liberal social and spiritual aspirations of younger generations.

This period (ca. 1827-1867) was also characterized by tensions and conflicts surrounding the appointment and role of the *hazzanim* of Mikvé Israel. A regulation of 1839 prohibited the congregation singing in “high voice,” probably at the initiative of a new breed of cantors who were disturbed by the “noise” of the traditional synagogue. A musical first was reached on March 1845, when a choir of 26 children was established with the support of Hazzan David Cardoze, who was “beardless and advanced in his ideas.” This innovation was half-heartedly accepted by the community council which, fearing resistance by the conservative wing of the community, published a note in the newspaper openly announcing the forthcoming appearance of the choir (Emmanuel and Emmanuel 1970, I: 343-344).

By the mid-19th century, the involvement of the Jews in the financial and artistic life of the island was notable. The first theatre group of Curaçao, Teatro Naar, was established by the Jewish poet and writer Jacob Jeosuah Naar (Emmanuel and Emmanuel 1970, I: 480-481). By the early 20th century, the local banking institutions were owned by Jews of the Maduro, Curiel and Edwards Henriquez families and much of the island's shipping and trading was in Jewish hands. At the same time, many Jews left Curaçao in the early and mid-19th century and continued to do so until well into the 20th century, seeking economic opportunities elsewhere in the Caribbean and North and South America.

These complex socio-economical and cultural processes of change climaxed in the 1860s, when the society called "El Porvenir" ("The Future") was founded in 1862 followed in 1864 by a schism leading to the founding of the Emanuel Congregation of Curaçao. The more liberal dissenting group consecrated their "Temple" on what is now the Wilhelminaplein (two blocks south of the Mikvé Israel synagogue) in 1867. This move was accompanied by the establishment of a separate Jewish cemetery on Berg Altena. In the absence of a formal spiritual leader in its early years, the new community turned to the leader of Temple Emanu-El of New York City, Rabbi Samuel Adler, for guidance, thus becoming the first overtly Reform Sephardic congregation ever. Later, several ministers served Temple Emanuel: Jeosuah Naar Jr., Jacob de Isaac Mendes de Solla, Moises Salas, Moise Lopez de Leao Laguna, Mortimer de Samuel Alvarez Correa, and

the lay leader Dr. Moreno Maurits Goudekot, who was followed by Rabbi Simeon J. Maslin (from 1962).

Mikvé Israel did not remain immune to the modernization of synagogue services designed to suit the sensibilities of newer generations of Curaçao-born Jews. In 1864 a mixed choir of sixty singers was established at Mikvé Israel and two years later this congregation inaugurated its 634-pipe Flaes & Brunjes organ in the balcony especially constructed for this purpose (Emmanuel and Emmanuel 1970, I: 393-395). These were clear moves towards the beautification of the synagogue ritual as well as an attempt to counter the appeal of Temple Emanuel.

Social upheavals were accompanied by a linguistic shift. In the 19th century, Spanish became more important than Portuguese due to the commercial ties with Venezuela and the Southern Caribbean area, and the local language of Curaçao, Papiamentu, was another necessary vehicle of communication. The last sermon in Portuguese was delivered at Mikvé Israel by Hakham Aron Mendes Chumaceiro, the last bastion of traditional Portuguese Judaism in Curaçao, in 1875. Although the Portuguese language stratum disappeared from the Jewish community of Curaçao, it is still emblematically present during religious services in some announcements and in the prayers for the Dutch Royal House and the Government. English also became more frequently used in Curaçao due to its connections with the North-Eastern Caribbean. Ties developed in particular between the Jewish communities of Curaçao and St. Thomas.

In the early 1960's, the ideological differences between Mikvé Israel and Temple Emanuel which had led to the 19th century split became obsolete. In 1964, exactly one hundred years after their separation, the two congregations reunited, creating the United Netherlands Portuguese Congregation Mikvé Israel-Emanuel. The American-trained Rabbi Simeon J. Maslin and Cantor Norman Swerling, were engaged to lead the unified community. The American Reconstructionist liturgical custom was adopted, probably as a compromise gesture towards the elders of the nominally orthodox Mikvé Israel and those following the more liberal rites of Temple Emanuel.

In spite of the modern American Jewish orientation of its clergy, the newly constituted congregation took special care to openly display elements of its original Portuguese-Dutch Jewish pedigree. In 1992, during an official visit to Curaçao, the Dutch Royal family (Queen Beatrix, Prince Claus, Crown-Prince William Alexander and the Princes Johan Friso and Constantijn), attended a special service in Mikvé Israel-Emanuel to commemorate "400 Years of Religious Freedom for Jews under the House of Orange." The selection of this year was not coincidental, for it also marked the 500th anniversary of the expulsion of the Jews from Spain.

Another recent event full of symbolic gestures regarding the pedigree of the community was the 2001 commemoration of the 350th anniversary of Jewish settlement in Curaçao (see below). A restoration of the pipe organ was one of the projects associated with this anniversary and the costs were covered primarily by a gift from the government of the Netherlands. Shipped to the Netherlands for

restoration, the renovated musical instrument returned to Curaçao in 2003, where it was re-assembled and then inaugurated in festive ceremonies.

Some 450 Jews live today in Curaçao, with a majority of them belonging to Mikvé Israel-Emanuel community and the remaining ones to the Ashkenazi Congregation Shaarei Tsedek. The latter grew from the immigration to Curaçao of Central and Eastern European Jews, starting in the mid-1920s.

Members of the Curaçao Jewish community continue to play a vital part in Curaçao's economic, commercial, cultural and social life. Declared a World Heritage City of UNESCO, Punda, the downtown district of Willemstad, capital of Curaçao, includes its 1732 Portuguese synagogue as one of its most cherished architectural and historical treasures.

Liturgical music and the construction of Jewish identities in Curaçao

When trying to unravel the meaning of the manuscript collection of liturgical music reviewed in 2000 by Goldstein and Zelermyer at the Mikvé Israel-Emanuel synagogue for the preparation of this CD (fifteen boxes of “old music,” as described to them by Rabbi Tayvah), one has to consider the diverse transformations that the Curaçao Jewish community underwent.² In spite of the relatively extensive literature on the Jews of Curaçao not much has been written about their liturgical music. In the most comprehensive work ever written on the Jews of the Netherlands Antilles (Emmanuel and Emmanuel 1970), the historian Rabbi Isaac S. A. Emmanuel, who officiated in Curaçao for a short period from 1936 to 1939 and continued to be in close contact with the community until the 1970s, and his wife Suzanne provided valuable if surprisingly meager information about the musical life of the Curaçao synagogues. His exhaustive research of every document and archive related to this community generally disregards its musical collections. This neglect of the Sephardic liturgical repertoire in Curaçao would appear to be a reflection of Emmanuel’s overtly critical attitude towards the processes of modernization.

² Two ethnographical studies of the Jewish community of Curaçao address these processes and mention aspects of synagogue life without focusing on music: Benjamin 2002 and Karner 1969.

A later anthology of Curaçao’s Jewish liturgical music edited and annotated by Cantor Norman Swerling (Swerling 1997), is the only outline of the development of the music at the Mikvé Israel-Emanuel Synagogue (Swerling 1997: 34-39). Swerling’s book entitled “The Music of the Sephardim in Curaçao,” also serves as a primary source for the elucidation of how this community portrayed itself in sound.

Swerling suggests several stages in the development of liturgical music in Curaçao prior to his arrival to the island in 1963. First, “the liturgical musical traditions which they [the first settlers] brought to Curaçao were... a mixture of Amsterdam Sephardic worship modes and the Spanish and Portuguese Catholic chants and practices of their converso period.” Secondly, “from the 17th through the mid-19th centuries, all the ḥazzanim (cantors) and rabbis who served Cong. Mikvé Israel were graduates of, or endorsed by the Eys Hayim Seminary of Amsterdam.” Henceforth, “ḥazzanim could not make any innovations in the prayers” (as provided in the *hascamot* or congregational regulations of 1752, cf. Emmanuel and Emmanuel 1970, I: 250). Thirdly, “by the 19th century... many... leaders traveled extensively and brought back to the island a certain degree of social sophistication. Their mansions in the elegant Scharloo area of the town all had ballrooms which rang with the music of Europe.” As a result, “music of the synagogue also progressed and adapted to the style of the place and times.”

Swerling also touches on the drastic changes that occurred in the 1860s. As was discussed earlier, “having being exposed to Reform Judaism in Europe and

the United States, [the Mikvé Israel congregants of the time] demanded more religious liberalization.” These demands could not be accepted by Hakham Mendes Chumaceiro and the dissidents eventually founded the new synagogue whose main feature was that “it was equipped with a splendid pipe organ which induced even more members to leave Mikvé Israel for Emanuel.” Music aesthetics was a crucial issue in the communal rift. Swerling adds that “after a bitter and protracted series of meetings and discussions, Rabbi Chumaceiro opened the door for an organ to be used on a limited basis in this bastion of Sephardi Orthodoxy.” He also adds that “choir singing at Mikvé Israel was a long and beloved tradition, and women were allowed to sing in the choir, albeit in a sequestered section, as early as 1863.” (Swerling 1997: 35-37)

Swerling makes two interesting statements when commenting on the subsequent musical developments in the two Jewish congregations. On the one hand, he asserts that “Western Sephardic worship is very stylized... The traditional music of both Mikvé Israel and Temple Emanuel is just as stylized. A listener could hardly distinguish this music from that of other Western Sephardic synagogues such as Bevis Marks in London or Shearith Israel in New York with the exception of the organ accompaniment.” On the other hand, he states “by the end of the 19th century a certain amount of Ashkenazi influence came to affect the music of Curaçao synagogues. This was mainly due to the monumental achievements of men like Salomon Sulzer in Vienna and Louis Lewandowski in

Berlin. The Lewandowski arrangement of the Kol Nidrei was, and remains to be, the arrangement of choice in Curaçao.”

These statements must be taken with caution. It is hard to assess how close the liturgical music in Curaçao was to that practiced in other Portuguese synagogues in Europe and the USA at any given point in history. Also, the extent of the circulation of European (i.e. Ashkenazi) liturgical music in the island appears to have been rather limited and mostly related to the Reform congregation Emanuel.

As Swerling confesses, he was trained at Hebrew Union College, the school of the Reform movement in the USA, as an Ashkenazi cantor. His being hired by this Portuguese community was unthinkable before the 1960s. It appears that a portion of the “Ashkenazi” materials introduced to the Curaçao synagogue pertains to Swerling’s tenure there (1964-1967) or to later periods. Also, a few Portuguese melodies that have not been traced back to the community’s musical archive but appeared in Swerling’s collection were adopted by him from extant published anthologies in an attempt to perpetuate the Portuguese component of the liturgy as demanded from him by the Directiva of the congregation. A most apparent example is the *Lekha dodi* (no. 26 in this CD), which is almost identical to the one included in the important anthology of Hazzan David Aharon de Sola from Amsterdam and London (Aguilar-De Sola 1857 [1933]). Another traditional Portuguese piece included in Swerling’s collection is a *Hallel* (Swerling 1997: 86-87; this melody is associated in Portuguese sources with Passover, see Seroussi 1996: 114-116).

The archival music data from Curaçao that reached us presents a rather fragmentary picture, as Swerling already noticed in his essay. He refers to the “merged musical files” of the two synagogues (Mikvé Israel and Emanuel) upon their reunification and regrets that “handwritten manuscripts ... omitted the composers’ names. We know that... some of the music was composed and arranged by their non-Jewish organists. In addition, a few pieces came as merely fragments from someone’s choir book and have to be reconstructed.” (Swerling 1997:39) Following his visit to Curaçao, Goldstein reported a similar, if not worse, situation of the music archive and this research thus became a timely effort.

Therefore, when interpreting what these remaining musical documents tell us about the music of this community one needs to draw also on alternative literary sources that may offer a more coherent picture. The following paragraphs are devoted to some historical events that showcased Curaçao’s Jewish musical tradition, leaving for future research a deeper appreciation of it.

Starting from the most recent celebrations, the present publication recalls the festive mood that the 2001 celebration of the community’s 350th anniversary generated in the hearts of the present-day Jews of Curaçao. Reaching back to the reconstitution of the Mikvé Israel-Emanuel congregation in 1964, an implied dialogue with the revered Portuguese past of the community found its expression in the liturgical music used in the historical synagogue (which is still warmly referred to as “Snoa”, the Portuguese Dutch derivation of “sinagoga”). The social

construction of contemporary Curaçao “Portuguese” Jewish identity through music can be gleaned from the following excerpts of a report of the 2001 celebrations (Lichtenstein 2001; translated from Spanish by E. Seroussi):

“An open air concert was the main event in the celebrations *L’Chayim Korsow*. A choir of the Cantors’ Assembly flew specially from the USA to attend the occasion. Cantor Spindel from Aruba was invited to join the choir. The concert was conceived by Cantor Norman Swerling, who served as hazzan from 1964 to 1967 and Ben Steiner, but [Swerling] could not attend due to bad health [he passed away soon after]. The excellent local group, *Serenada*, formed in 1976, interpreted songs from the island, reinterpreted with special flavor, singing sometimes *a capella*, with exquisite sense of rhythm and subtle innovations... When the director of the concert, Dr. Ben Steinberg..., joined the singers on the stage, we started to understand how these two cultures are interwoven. The local public is as pleased as the visitors from abroad for this opportunity to hear this eclectic program that included music by contemporary Jewish and Israeli composers. Music is a marvelous way of expressing feelings, and a special chemistry was immediately created between the audience and the cantors. The spirit of the Sephardic Jews who came to Curaçao in search of religious freedom is floating in the air and one can feel its presence. The concert reaches its end, but the audience refuses to leave. When finally they align to leave, we

feel that each one of the spectators is taking back to his home a new connection with the Sephardi Jews who, under the leadership of Joao d'Ylan, disembarked on the island, just retaken from Spain, 350 years ago...”

On Monday April 23, 2001, a commemorative service conducted by Rabbi Michael Tayvah was held at the synagogue with the presence of His Royal Highness Willem Alexander, Prince of the Netherlands. Once again, the Portuguese pedigree of the synagogue music was displayed:

“I was really transported to the 17th century when Rabbi Tayvah and the congregation intoned the traditional Sephardi melodies and my eyes were wet thinking on the history of these brave Jews who, against all odds achieved so much and kept the richness of their faith and traditions for the future generations.”

It is clear that the topic of music is a strong element in the manner in which Jews from Curaçao imagine themselves nowadays. An idealized narrative based on the continuity of the Portuguese Jewish heritage through musical performance is a powerful component in the identity of members of a Jewish community which has otherwise undergone extreme social upheavals in its three and a half centuries of existence. A handful of descendants of the earliest Jewish settlers hosted “other”

Jews who were eager to connect with their prestigious Portuguese Jewish pedigree. Similar phenomena are found in the Spanish-Portuguese Jewish communities of Amsterdam, London and New York, whose liturgical music is one of the chief components in the safeguarding of the Portuguese Jewish heritage by immigrant Jews of most diverse origins. It has to be stressed that academic scholarship has contributed its share to foster this “noble” image of Portuguese Jewishness which does not cease to fascinate and attract Jews everywhere.

Other celebratory events of 2001 were designed to reinforce the Sephardic connection. Lectures and seminars by distinguished American and Dutch Jewish figures associated with the Reform and Reconstructionist movements discussed issues related to Sephardic history and the survival of “endangered, small and distant” Jewish communities, such as the Portuguese *conversos* in the past and present. The tortuous Western Sephardic history and the “search for political and religious freedom” in Holland and its colonies were stressed in these events. “Flexibility, compromise and innovation” were the attitudes suggested for Jewish survival, next to the continuity of “authentic traditions” and the reciprocal support between large and small Jewish communities worldwide. In conclusion, the Jewish community of Curaçao was cherished as a “magnificent example” of a small community loyal to its past and yet attentive to the present needs of modern Jews.³

³ Judah Cohen referred me to his similar analysis of the events that took place marking the bicentennial of the Jewish community of Saint Thomas. See Cohen 2004, esp. pp. 204-207.

The central role of musical performance during the 2001 celebrations recalled an earlier event that took place at Mikvé Israel in 1932, on the bicentennial of the synagogue. A detailed, anonymous and extremely florid report of this festive event held on Wednesday night, April 20, 1932 (during the Passover festival) appeared in Spanish in the Curaçao periodical “Boletín Comercial” just two days after. It is worth quoting a section of this report for it illuminates some major issues in the music history of this Jewish community (all translations by E. Seroussi; see also Emmanuel and Emmanuel 1970, I: 490-491). It also shows that the synagogue’s musical performances were an important marker of Curaçao Jewish identity in the past as well. Attended by all the senior authorities of the island, representatives of the Church, the Dutch armed forces, the local press and more, the event

“opened with an original composition composed for that occasion by the well-known musical genius of our homeland, Charles L. Maduro, played admirably on the organ by the spiritual Señorita Sybil L. Maduro, who proved that she inherited the musical talent of her parents and grandmother, the beloved writer and composer Señora Sarah H. de Maduro. After that, the organ was played by Maestro R. Th. Palm, who performed the Hallel, a great composition by Maestro C. Ulder, who for many years was the organist of the synagogue. Next came Baruch Habah, the beautiful composition by another musical genius, Don Manuel S. L. Maduro, known for his musical skills

since the times of the Sociedad Filarmónica ‘Orfeo’ [“an orchestra made up principally of Jewish musicians”, c.f. Emmanuel and Emmanuel 1970, I: 482]; it was stupendously performed by the Choir, and captivating the audience was the pleasant Señora Reneta B. de Curiel, who sang the difficult solo, and who literally electrified her listeners with her imposing voice. The rabbi of the community, the reverend B. D. Duque, with his sonorous and cultivated voice, then sang *Lael Ngolam*, to ancient music arranged for this occasion by the same rabbi who also wrote the text dedicated to Mikvé Israel. The duet of this delicate composition was exquisitely sung by the distinguished sisters Señoras Rebecca Deborah Maduro and Deborah Rebecca Maduro (de) Da Costa Gómez, whose melodious voices deeply moved the public with the harmony that resulted from their combination.”

Other musical components of the event described in this report were: the ceremonial removal of the Torah Scrolls, “to the delicate music by the late Director of the Choir of the Synagogue, Señor Mordechai Capriles of blessed memory”; “*Tehillat*, a brilliant composition commissioned for this occasion by Don Manuel S. L. Maduro with the solo part sung by Señorita Reneta B. de Curiel that was the climax of all the music of the evening”; “*Halehuya* a famous composition by the notable Maestro Mendels[s]ohn was another heartening harmonic note with which the [four part] Choir amazed the audience”; “*Adon ’olam* to the music of

Don Manuel S. L. Maduro...with another exquisite solo...by Señorita Reneta B. de Curiel” and the final piece for organ “especially written for this occasion by Charles Maduro.”

Musical performances displaying continuity and innovation, as well as adherence to the “authentic” Portuguese repertoire, comprised then the core of this remarkable historical event of 1932. Scores of some of the pieces performed on this occasion were preserved in the music archives of the community, as well as were pieces related to the remarkable celebration of the one-hundredth birthday of Sir Moses Montefiore at Temple Emanuel on October 26-27, 1884 (Emmanuel and Emmanuel 1970, I: 400-401).

We can identify in the 1932 report the figure of Ḥazzan Baruch de David Duque, formerly from Hamburg, who is hardly mentioned in the official narratives of Mikvé Israel-Emanuel (perhaps because of his overt liberalism on religious matters, c.f. Emmanuel and Emmanuel 1970, I: 490-491). However, he was certainly instrumental in sustaining the relationship between the repertoire from Curaçao and the music of the Portuguese community in Amsterdam in the first half of the 20th century. Born in Amsterdam in 1883, ḥazzan Duque was educated in his home city. His family produced other musicians, most notably Ḥazzan Simon de David Duque (1897-1945) cantor in Amsterdam beginning in 1923 and David Duque (1901-1970), a bass singer with the choir of the Ashkenazic Great Synagogue in Amsterdam.

Ḥazzan Baruch de David Duque arrived in Curaçao on September 4, 1923, most likely to officiate during the High Holidays. He served as leader of the Mikvé Israel congregation until 1936. His composition *Lael Ngolam* is a “cover” of an anonymous 18th century cantata from Amsterdam (*Le-el 'olam segulei ram*, Ms. Den Haag, Gemente Museum, 23 D 24, no. 16, which in itself draws from another poem appearing in Portuguese sources from Amsterdam, cf. Adler 1974: 20) with a text composed by him to suit the occasion. We can also attribute to him the discovery in the community’s music archives of *Be-fi yesharim*, a piece by the 18th century non-Jewish composer Cristiano Giuseppe Lidarti who wrote several works on behalf of the Portuguese synagogue in Amsterdam (Adler 1974: 84-89). In conclusion, as late as the early 1930s, there existed a strong connection with the Portuguese synagogue music from Amsterdam.

But the Portuguese heritage was by no means the only, and perhaps not the prime, musical resource of the two Curaçao synagogues. A diversified musical repertoire is quite apparent from the above-cited report on the celebrations of 1932.

Prominent roles in the composition and performance of synagogue music were played by members of at least three generations of the Maduro clan. Of special notice is the towering figure of Eleazer [sic] H. S. (Charles) L. Maduro (1883-1947). Described as a “musical treasure” of Curaçao, Charles Maduro was a key personage in the development of the local Curaçao salon music, with an input of

waltzes, marches and songs (see Dower 1977: 31-32; on the Curaçao waltz see, De Jong 2003). A testimony of Maduro's international reputation is the publication of some of his works in the USA, copies of which are extant in American collections.⁴ In spite of his dedication to the synagogue, Maduro's identity leaned towards his motherland. Emmanuel and Emmanuel (1970, I: 482) inform us that he provided in his will for a music fund "for the development of music in Curaçao." Several pieces by another member of the Maduro family, Manuel S. L. Maduro, were also found in the music archive.

Works by another local Jewish composer whose composition is mentioned in the 1932 event appear in the musical archive of Curaçao as well. Mordechai Capriles was one of the two gentlemen who in 1864 organized Mikvé Israel's 60-person choir after being instructed to do so by Rabbi Mendes Chumaceiro. He was a well-known individual who together with his brother Dr. David Ricardo Capriles frequently organized many tropical evenings of musical and theatrical entertainment at his home, generally referred to as "Salon Capriles." (Notably, Dr. David Ricardo Capriles was Gideon Zelermyer's great-great-grandfather),

⁴ Examples of Maduro's songs are "Welcome Home March" of 1927 (words: J. Parker Coombs, at the Ada Holding Miller Sheet Music Collection, University of Iowa Library), "Girls who came from Peru," Latino Music Corp., 1942 (words by Charles Tobias, at Penn State University Library), and songs published by O. Flaschner in New York (at University of Northern Texas, Special Music Collections): "La gitanita" (1928), "At evening" (1927), "Helene" (1927), and "America" (1928).

It appears, however, that most of the materials unearthed by Goldstein and Zelermyer in the music archive belonged to Temple Emanuel. One of the most prolific musicians of the Temple was Jeosuah de Abraham Haim Naar (1817-1874), known as Jeosuah Naar Jr., who served as "voorzanger" and performed rabbinical functions too. One manuscript in the archive found in two similar copies seems to be a complete liturgical compendium of forty pages (some are missing) containing forty eight numbers collected or edited by him. The majority of the pieces are of his authorship, but the compendium also includes works by J. Palm (see below). This source also includes an adaptation of a melody by Carl Maria von Weber, as well as short pieces by two distinguished synagogue music composers from the 19th century: Samuel Naumbourg from Paris, and Salomon Sulzer from Vienna. The only traditional Portuguese piece in this compendium is the hymn *El nora gnalilah* for the Ne'ilah service of Yom Kippur which Naar seems to attribute to himself. Incidentally, a prayer book that was in Naar's possession is still found at the Mongui Maduro Library. This is a "modern" prayer book printed by the French *Consistoire*, further attesting to the flowing of liturgical materials from Western Europe to Curaçao.⁵

⁵ From the online catalogue of the Mongui Maduro Library: *Prières d'un Coeur Israélite: Livre d'offices et recueil de prières et de méditations pour toutes les circonstances de la vie.* - 2me ed. - Strasbourg: Société consistoriale des Bon Livres; Paris: Archives Israélites, 1853.

Besides the names of Sulzer and Naumbourg, two 20th century Ashkenazi composers are mentioned in the music archive: Pavel Slavensky and Josef Weiss from Warsaw. Slavensky, who was born in 1909 as Pinchos Yaakov Freilich in Czechoslovakia, was one of six children of a hassid from the Belzer court. After WWII, he served at various congregations in the USA, became the first permanent cantor of the Adat Shalom Synagogue in Northwest Detroit where he served until 1949 when he moved to Temple Sholem on Lake Shore Drive, Chicago.⁶ He was in Curaçao from 1971 to 1975 and edited a selection of transliterations of responses and hymns of the Sabbath service (Slavensky 1977; reedited by Van der Voort 1988). One piece attributed to him, *En kelohenu*, was found in the archive. About J. L. Weiss little is known. An undated piece by him *Einst sehen unser Augen/Jiru enenu* in German for choir and organ is found in the sheet music collection of the Jewish Public Library Archives of Montreal.

It may be concluded that Jewish musicians played an important role in the musical life of Curaçao. From the 1860s on, their participation in the musical life of the synagogue was for some of them, most prominently Charles Maduro, an extension of their “secular” activities. Yet, non-Jewish musicians also found in the synagogue a stage for their craft, especially because the bylaws of the congregation stipulated that the organist could not be a Jew. Consequently, the

⁶ See: *An Enchanted Evening with the Cantors: Max Jankowski, Pavel Slavensky, Maurice Levy, Haniggun Choral Ensemble* (De Saymont Classics LR-1004, 1955).

synagogue became an important source for musical employment in the island. These features clearly emerge from the materials found in Curaçao’s synagogue music archives (but not from Swerling’s publication).

First among the non-Jewish musicians who served the Jewish community was Christiaan Alardus Ulden (1841-1895). He was a completely self taught musician who at the age of thirteen was appointed organist of the historical Santa Anna church. At the same time, he was the concertmaster for the Dutch military garrison in Curaçao and a composer of salon music (Dower 1977: 31-32). Upon the installation of the organ at Mikvé Israel in 1866, he became the organist at the synagogue, an appointment he held until his death.

But impressive above all for their participation in the musical life of the synagogues Mikvé Israel and Emanuel for almost a century and a half are members of several generations of the Palm family of musicians from Willemstad, Curaçao. The first member of this lineage of musicians was Jan Gerard Palm (1831- 1906) whose name appears in the older music manuscripts associated with Temple Emanuel. Kapellmeister, organist (as well as piano, clarinet, lute, flute and mandolin player), composer and teacher for forty years, he was a well-known composer of Antillean dance music. Rudolf Theodoor (Dòdò) Palm (1880-1950) was, as was Jan Gerard, a prolific instrumentalist, a long-term organist of the Protestant Church, builder of pianola rolls as well as composer of waltzes, dances and marches. Telésforo Alberto (Albert) Palm (1903-1958), son of Rudolf Theodoor, contrabassist of the

Curaçaosch Philharmonisch Orkest and composer of popular Antillean music, especially of waltzes, began his career as organist in the synagogue.

The last member of this clan who contributed his musical talents to benefit the Mikvé Israel community was Edgar Rudolf Roemer Palm. Born on February 8, 1905, he was the second child of Rudolf Theodoor and started studying piano, organ, and violin with his father at the age of six. By the age of eleven, he was already replacing his father from time to time as organist in the Protestant Church. As a teenager, he routinely accompanied various artists in Salon Habana and the Jewish-owned Teatro Naar. In 1921, he went to Holland with a grant from the government to study mechanical engineering. While in Holland, he was also actively involved in music, playing chamber music and later performing piano recitals. Back in Curaçao he studied again with his father, who also introduced him to the Ka'i òrgel, the autochthonous cylinder piano of Curaçao. He became a central figure in the musical life of the island: member of the Curaçaosch Philharmonisch Orkest, founder of the V-string Orchestra, organist at the Santa Famia Church, musical producer for films, lecturer, musical critic, board member of the Curaçaosche Muziekschool, and first president of the Organization of musicians of Curaçao. In 1950 when Antillean music was issued on records for the first time by Thomas Henriquez, the musical group "Edgar Palm y Trio" was formed, recording 37 singles and 6 LPs. Edgar Palm provided the music on occasions when members of the Dutch Royal Family and other dignitaries visited the island. From 1975, he taught piano,

harmony and Ka'i òrgel at the CCC-Music Academy that in 1997 was named after him. This extremely distinguished musician served for forty-two years as organist at Mikvé Israel, a testimony of the central role that the synagogue played in the musical life of Willemstad. He died on January 12, 1998 at the age of 92.

Another interesting non-Jewish musician with ties to the Jewish community of Curaçao was the noted Venezuelan composer and pianist Sebastián Díaz Peña (1844-1926). Born in Puerto Cabello, he moved as a youngster to Valencia where he became a piano teacher. Later on, he was assistant conductor of the opera company of Egisto Petrilli, touring South America in 1879. As composer, Díaz Peña's repertoire includes a great number of waltzes such as "Marisela", his most famous piece. Díaz Peña was forced into exile in Curaçao in 1915, when the government of President Cipriano Castro, of whose official band he was the director, was overthrown. He returned to his motherland in 1925 settling in Maracay where President Juan Vicente Gómez appointed him as conductor of the official orchestra. It is not surprising that such a distinguished Venezuelan artist would write music for the Jewish community in Curaçao, particularly if one considers the ties between the Jews of the island and those of its closest mainland neighbor (see Levy-Benshimol 2002 and Sola 1991). Two compositions by Díaz Peña survived in the Mikvé Israel - Emanuel archives. One is the *Marcha Nupcial* dedicated to the wedding of Señorita Haydee Delvalle and Señor Elias Moreno Brandão that took place in Curaçao on March 20, 1916. In style, the music recalls the earlier Latin

American writing of Louis Moreau Gottschalk with a touch of Chopin. The second piece, *Tehillat* for Cantor, soprano and two-part choir and organ, dated September 1912 (and therefore preceding the composer's exile in the island), was dedicated to the Choir of Temple Emanuel and has a Curaçao dance-like rhythm.

In conclusion, the small but prominent Jewish community of Curaçao had a notorious role in the musical affairs of the island. The two "Portuguese" synagogues of Curaçao were a focus for musical activities with many of the most distinguished local musicians, Jewish and non-Jewish, serving as performers and providing new compositions.

Repertoire in the Curaçao synagogue music sources

The manuscripts in the archive of the Curaçao synagogue include music for the entire liturgical order of Sabbaths and most especially for the High Holidays. They cover almost a century and a half of activities in both Mikvé Israel and Emanuel before and after the reunification of 1964. The archive records the musical developments that probably started after the split of 1864 and the beginnings of the performance of instrumental and choral music during religious services.

A majority of these sources consist of original settings by the local composers mentioned above, as well as materials drawn from diverse Western European and American sources, attesting to the major impact that the process of modernization had on the music of the two nominally Portuguese synagogues on the island. We say nominally because few items from the Portuguese Jewish music tradition were preserved in the manuscripts. All in all and in spite of the materials lost or partially preserved (senior members of the community communicated to Goldstein and Zelermyer that over the years much had been thrown away), the musical output of these Caribbean synagogues is impressive for its volume and originality, reflecting the cosmopolitan milieu and mobility of the Jewish islanders.

Most of the remaining music manuscripts from Curaçao are choral parts that do not include the organ sections as well as the parts performed by the cantor

(usually marked as “Min.” namely “Minister”). In most cases, the name of the composer is missing and it is difficult to determine the extent to which the music was originally written for the synagogue or if it was adapted from another source to the Hebrew text.

The majority of the pieces in the collection are settings of what can be defined as the ceremonial sections of the liturgical order for the Sabbaths and Holy Days. These sections comprise the opening of the service (*Barekhu*), the Hallel Psalms for holidays and the New Month, the ending hymns of the service (*Adon 'olam*, *En kelohenu* and *Yigdal*), and most especially the opening and closing verses of the Torah Service (*Yimlokh*, *Tehillat Adonay yidaber fi*, *Romemu*, *Mizmor le-David*, *Barukh ha-ba*, *Shuva li-me'onekh*, and *Etz hayyim hi*). Diverse settings of the same text are identified in the different manuscripts by a serial number (e.g. “*Adon 'olam* no. 8”). There are up to fourteen different settings of *Adon 'olam*.

Some manuscripts in the archive are comprehensive and contain more complete liturgical text settings. These include the liturgy for the Sabbath, including pieces for Kabbalat Shabbat, and the morning service (*Qedushah*, *Hanoten teshu'a*, and Psalms).

Although until the 1840s most of liturgical repertoire at Mikvé Israel probably drew from the Portuguese Jewish music tradition, the traces of this repertoire in the manuscript sources are minimal. Among the traditional Portuguese pieces located are various copies of a setting of the traditional Portuguese melody for the *'akedah* (a 12th century piyyut on the topic of the Binding of Isaac) *Gnet Shagnré*

(*'Et sha'arei ratzon le-hipateah*) for soprano, baritone, and choir, that is sung on the second day of Rosh Hashanah. This melody appears to be one of the few that circulated uninterruptedly in the repertoire for three centuries. One of these versions was copied by American Rabbi Philip J. Bentley who served in Curaçao in 1975-1978. He was asked by the Directiva to try to “restore” the “old” musical tradition and copied some melodies from extant manuscripts (personal communication October 2, 2007). Other Portuguese pieces appearing in manuscripts of Temple Emanuel are *El nora 'alilah* (Ne'ilah service of Yom Kippur) and *En kelohenu* no. 3 which uses a melody known in sources from Amsterdam as *Hallel d'Italia* (see Seroussi 1992: 124-125). Many liturgical texts in the Portuguese traditions of Amsterdam and London are adapted to this traditional melody. In addition, the pieces from the art music repertoire from Amsterdam that were performed in the 1932 commemoration were also found in the archives.

Some music written expressly for special personal milestones was also preserved, such as the aforementioned wedding piece by Rodríguez Peña and two pieces for the silver wedding anniversary of the Reverend M. de Leao Laguna who was the reader at Temple Emanuel. Not much is known about this honoree except that he published a Jewish calendar, a copy of which can be found at the Mongui Maduro Library.

Not without interest is the inclusion in some manuscripts of two anthems by the Dutch Protestant composer Adriaen Valerius (c.1575-1625), the author of the

famous *Nederlandsche gedenck-clanck*, one of them being his famous *Wilt Heden Nu Treden* (known in English as “We Gather Together”). The access to these materials was certainly through the organists of the Palm family who also served the Reform Church in Curaçao. Valerius’ anthems appear next to *Rock of Ages*, the English version of the Hebrew Hanukkah anthem *Ma’oz tzur yeshu’ati*. The writer of *Rock of Ages* was Rabbi Gustav Gottheil (1827-1903) who succeeded Rabbi Samuel Adler at Temple Emanu-El in New York City, the mother congregation of the synagogue of the same name in Curaçao. Gottheil included Christian hymns in his pioneer Reform Jewish hymnal published in 1886 and this source may explain the appearance of these materials in the Curaçao collection.

Finally, the level of the performance and the degree of proficiency of the musicians who served in the two Portuguese synagogues is attested to by the high level of vocal demands that many of the compositions in the Curaçao synagogue archive require. In spite of the compound stylistic character of this repertoire, which included such disparate items as Protestant anthems, traditional Portuguese Jewish tunes, modern Ashkenazi pieces and some compositions in the local Antillean dance styles, the most dominant language is the one of Italian opera. This idiom demanded trained lyric voices and well organized choirs. In this sense, the music of the synagogues of Curaçao from the 1860s to the 1960s followed a pattern similar to that of the modernized synagogues of France and Italy which drew much of their inspiration from the stage of music drama.

The selections in this CD

The selections prepared for this CD represent the texts most conspicuously set to music in the Curaçao synagogue archive. These are opening and closing sections of the Torah Service (*Tehillat Adonay yidaber fi*, *Romemu*, *Barukh ha-ba* and *Etz hayim hi*) and ending hymns of the service, *En kelohenu*, *Adon ‘olam* and *Yigdal*. Wedding music is represented by a piece adapted from Lewandowski.

The fragmentary character of the sources limited the selection to pieces that could be reconstructed in a reasonable manner. For practical purposes, it was decided to rearrange all the pieces, originally meant for cantor, various soloists, choir and organ, for voice and piano. Some pieces are reproduced literally in accordance to the original, but judicious editing and arranging was applied to others.

The following pieces are still very much part of the present day’s repertoire: *Barukh ha-ba* no. 1 (track 23) known as the “Snoa Barukh haba”; *Gadelu* no. 3 (opens *Romemu*, track 3); *Mizmor le-David havu l-Adonay* no. 2 (track 5); *Etz hayyim hi* (track 4); *Bendigamos* (track 14) and *Adon ‘olam* (track 13). The choral pieces were taken from Swerling’s collection and they represent the more recent musical practices of the unified synagogue, Mikvé Israel-Emanuel.

Bendigamos (track 14) and *Adon ‘olam* (track 13) are not found in the archival material but are performed assiduously at Mikvé Israel-Emanuel. The first piece is an exceptional Jewish song in Spanish, a paraphrase of the grace after the meals

(especially for the Three Festivals) set to the traditional Portuguese tune of the Song of the Sea or Song of Moses. Solomon (1969) has shown some interesting threads in the path of *Bendigamos* from Southern France to Curaçao from where it also spread, in the early 20th century to the Spanish-Portuguese community of New York City. The second composition is a famous and widely performed setting by Reverend David Aharon de Sola of London, published for the first time in his important collection (Aguilar-De Sola 1857). On this CD, it is set in a new arrangement for voice and piano.

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