

Learn more and listen to Iraqi-Jewish musicians

Overview

[When illiterate Jews dominated Iraqi music](#) (English) with video interview of *Menashi Somekh*, producer for Israel Broadcasting Authority. In Iraqi Arabic with English subtitles.

[The Jewish Role in Iraqi Music](#) by Yeheskel Kojaman.

[The Urban Arabic Repertoire of Jewish Professional Musicians in Iraq and Israel: Instrumental Improvisation and Culture Change](#) Ph.D. dissertation by Esther Warkov.

Ezra Aharon (“Azuri”) 1903-1995

Composer, ‘ud player, singer, conductor. Student of Tanburi Ibrahim Bey in Iraq. Was recording both Iraqi and Egyptian styles by 1929. Prizewinner for the ‘ud at the 1932 International Congress of Oriental Music, Cairo. Immigrated to Palestine. Developed ‘Oriental’ styles in Palestine/Israel. Active on Arabic broadcasting media in Israel. Composed songs with both Hebrew and Arabic texts as well as large instrumental and vocal works in Oriental styles. Broad knowledge of Iraqi maqamat but specialized in Egyptian style. See Warkov dissertation and Aharon [bio at JMRC](#).

In this 45-minute sound interview Aharon shares three of his 78 rpm historic recordings with Esther Warkov. Aharon and wife, Shulamit Aharon, discuss the musical styles that inform these compositions. (Hebrew, Iraqi Arabic, and English)

https://www.nli.org.il/he/items/NNL_MUSIC_AL000240996/NLI (The recording continues with Yaqub al-‘Amari, nay, at minute 45:50. See description under al-‘Amari, below.)

Aharon’s historic recordings with photos and documentation on Esther Warkov’s *Music for Peace in the Middle East* YouTube channel:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8eeR4eWnhls>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=69_M3ursio

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=am_VjrcwO88

Sound recordings at National Library of Israel (catalogue in Hebrew):

https://beta.nli.org.il/he/archives/NNL_MUSIC_AL003800491/NLI

http://zemer.nli.org.il/artist/Bait_Lazemer900389267

Selected recordings:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lk6L3jjh0cl> (taqsim)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t_sB1Gda6bc (religious אדון הסליחות בביצוע המלחין והמוסיקאי עזרא אהרון ז"ל)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Rb2Ow9Y6Bw> (אדון הסליחות בביצוע המלחין והמוסיקאי עזרא אהרון ז"ל)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Mdx8kevnus> (לא ביום ולא בלילה, ביצוע נדיר בסגנון המזרח) bayom veloo balyla/Bialik) עזרא אהרון

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lzluww57dFM> עזרא אהרון (עזורי) - רח א-שבאב

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ClehfkW-UeM> מנהג חדש

Hazzanut and piut portal:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9gaS3XQPqoM>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NOE7E5wa7u0>

Encyclopedia articles:

<https://www.encyclopedia.com/religion/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/aharon-ezra>

https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopedia-of-jews-in-the-islamic-world/aharon-ezra-SIM_0000930

<https://www.zemereshet.co.il/artist.asp?id=963> (Hebrew)

Hirshberg, Jehoash. "Performers Between East and West – Ideology and Reality in the Yishuv." In *Musical Performance*, an International Journal, Vol. 1 issue 2 (no year) The Performance of Jewish and Arab Music in Israel Today, Basil Tschaiikov and Amnon Shiloah, eds.

https://books.google.co.il/books?id=gw5ZCwAAQBAJ&pg=PT15&lpg=PT15&dq=eZra+aharon&source=bl&ots=VkwISVrOIH&sig=ACfU3U0eBDnwBtgOSfH5vtcMlu539y3UFw&hl=iw&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwjwYSTp_bIAhUOQxUIHbwwCFg4ChDoATAGegQICRAB#v=onepage&q=eZra%20aharon&f=false

Lachman, Robert. 2013. *The Oriental Music Broadcasts, 1936-1937: A Musical Ethnography of Mandatory Palestine*. Ruth F. David, ed. pp. 85-87. Middleton, WI: A-R Editions, Inc.

https://books.google.co.il/books?id=S6riAwAAQBAJ&pg=PA85&lpg=PA85&dq=eZra+aharon&source=bl&ots=dSM56wboHV&sig=ACfU3U3zGibof_jO4EK-zot8orlTWU3EHg&hl=iw&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwj_vlqeq_bIAhXKRBUiHSO7BVA4FBD0ATACegQIBxAB#v=onepage&q=eZra%20aharon&f=false

Cohen, Brigid. 2012. *Stefan Wolpe and the Avant-Garde Diaspora*. Cambridge University Press.

https://books.google.co.il/books?id=d3RmeQOEC7cC&pg=PA165&lpg=PA165&dq=eZra+aharon&source=bl&ots=bDxdv663To&sig=ACfU3U0ileBd4_lendbRBwvvKe3H_NG5jg&hl=iw&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwj_vlqeq_bIAhXKRBUiHSO7BVA4FBD0ATADegQIBhAB#v=onepage&q=eZra%20aharon&f=false

Library of Congress entry:

<https://www.loc.gov/audio/?fa=subject%3Ajewish+chants%7Clanguage%3Ahebrew%7Ccontributor%3Ashaashua%2C+ezra+aharon&c=150&all=true&st=list>

<https://kotar.cet.ac.il/KotarApp/Index/Page.aspx?nBookID=17149763&nTocEntryID=17422119&nPageID=17390448> (in Hebrew)

Yaqub Murad al-'Amari (aka Yaqub Bar-Nay), 1910- 1990 (?). 'Ud and nay player, composer, vocalist. Regular member of the Iraqi Broadcast Ensemble in Baghdad. After immigration to Israel worked as a singer, recorded Iraqi maqamat, pastat, and "mainstream" style songs for the Israel Broadcasting Authority (IBA), performed in private haflat (parties), and worked in other occupations out of necessity. Wrote a manuscript on Iraqi music theory but was discouraged by lack of recognition for his work. Was critical of the IBA and other institutions.

Al-'Amari's five nay taqasim in the Iraqi style begin at minute 45:50, recorded in 1969. Maqams husseini, owj, rast, mukhalif, panjegah.

https://www.nli.org.il/he/items/NNL_MUSIC_AL000240996/NLI. This link begins with Warkov's interview of Ezra Aharon in 1981.

Al-'Amari sings maqam rast followed by another maqam. Recorded by IBA, 1961.

https://www.nli.org.il/he/items/NNL_MUSIC_AL000241032/NLI

Al-'Amari sings maqam rast at minute 41:30, then maqam siga at minute 54:47, both recorded by IBA in 1970. https://www.nli.org.il/he/items/NNL_MUSIC_AL000241027/NLI

Search the National Library of Israel Warkov [collection](#) for several Iraqi maqamat performances by Yaqub al-'Amari.

Yitzhak Aviezer, 1936- Former Music Director and Producer for Voice of Israel in Arabic, composer, and conductor. Immigrated to Israel 1951. Initiated innovative recordings and performances within the Israel Broadcasting Authority framework. See his [biography in The Scribe](#).

See Yitzhak Aviezer's YouTube channel for several recordings of his compositions:

https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCTyceJ6EsyhDSYTX_3HKv1Q

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AcdXMPj5evE> (lecture)

http://zemer.nli.org.il/artist/Bait_Lazemer900324507 (one song)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aZ-zdNF3C1w> Jerusalem Orchestra East and West

Additional print information:

<https://bit.ly/3uJXKO> (Hebrew)

<https://www.maariv.co.il/culture/music/Article-579507> (Hebrew)

<https://bit.ly/2YqhXjz> (Hebrew)

<https://www.haaretz.co.il/gallery/1.1150527> (Hebrew)

Avraham Da'ud (Avraham David Ha-Cohen). Qanun player. While in Iraq, Avraham Da'ud performed with numerous Lebanese and Egyptian players such as Muhammad Salman, 'Abd al-Mutallib, with the latter for over two years. Little information is currently available but search the NLI archive for an interview of Avraham David Ha-Cohen with Professor Amnon Shiloah and [recordings deposited by Esther Warkov](#). An excerpt from the interview, below, appears in the Warkov dissertation.

"I've played the qanun since the age of seven; my father was also a qanun player and I loved the instrument as a child. One of my brothers played the violin, the other played 'ud. At the beginning, I started with the 'ud, but after noticing my father playing the qanun, I used to wait until he went to work or to the coffee house and I would take the instrument and practice on it a lot. My brother was a composer for a man who would come regularly with his poems to the house. This man also had an ensemble and noticed that I played qanun; he liked it very much and encouraged me to play. At that time I was eleven years old. In the area, there was a new group and they needed a qanun player. I don't know how, but I found myself with them."

Short taqsim here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fsPSzmkW5R4>

Albert Elias, 1927-2014. Nay player and maker, composer, member of the IBA orchestra. Immigrated to Israel ca. 1951. Studied law in Iraq and nay with a Syrian teacher in Baghdad. Played Iraqi and "mainstream" style but preferred the latter. Composed numerous songs and built plastic nays which could be tuned. Played with the Kuwaiti brothers and was featured on the 2011 album [Dudu Tassa and the Kuwaitis](#).

Recordings:

Two recordings for the JMRC publication *Taqasim: Instrumental Improvisations in Near Eastern Tradition*. Listen [here](#) or [here](#).

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FxqjIGggcrU> (Iraqi style)

NLI:

http://zemer.nli.org.il/artist/Bait_Lazemer900245294 (Hebrew)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mq-CT2cYm_o (interview)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tTbWTnWEPQY>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sw6DrNMPUpA>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kJgop67UTDE>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Rwx1PY8MYI>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TAAqMkObfOc>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NdUAz2EA5e8>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gnpu1Art95A>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NdUAz2EA5e8&list=PLONQt3CTISE8Ggg-7VrB8YT-Z_5VV9y9W

Milu Hamamah, 1943-. Well known singer of Iraqi music in Israel. Born in Iraqi, immigrated to Israel in 1950. Learned Iraqi music in Israel, motivated by ethnic pride. Occasionally attempted to sing the Iraqi maqam.

Milu Hamama YouTube channel:

https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLP2VXDK5zLGLuiAMNpJThARh_jAN50q40

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TAAqMkObfOc>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BMjzwL_ddK0

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tCZW2cNeSkw>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iW-f6hsiBgA>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YqF3CvwDS98>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gsdP-fjnHUg>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-QCiM5Cq-ql>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ha968ZC5Sj4>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W32KLYIP3Ms>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TAAqMkObfOc>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z_v8BYV6F0U

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W_8npsqA_M8

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OYzrvEJkco> (on Iraqi TV)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TkHFuk0ZGnQ>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QCL5e_1iU9E

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qn2AJw565_M

Salah al-Kuwaiti, 1910-1986. Born to Iraqi parents in Kuwait, immigrated to Iraq at age 17, to Israel in 1951. Composer and violinist. Performed “mainstream” and other Middle Eastern styles but reportedly preferred Iraqi style. Was very important to Baghdadi musical life – headed the Iraqi broadcasting channel ensemble and programmed its music for several years. Collaborated with his brother Da’ud, singer and ‘ud player. Recorded with the Israel Broadcasting Authority but never became a regular salaried player. In Israel worked mostly in private parties.

Recordings:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oFQVH9kpPPs> (Innovative version of traditional Iraqi maqam performed by orchestra without singer)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qn2AJw565_M

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ybw7INieV10>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jYfaD_Y0nUw

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TbKjA4GhKDI>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gK9OePY3_bo

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KaHTppwRE8w>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QX9oM62U76U>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H5bfRr8KjIU&t=11s> Tribute by Israel Radio in Arabic

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tf_lzrUe80A&t=11s violin taqsim
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v_LoT_CKAMQ with Salima Morad
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oRv8PIrW8fk> with Zakiyah George

JMRC bio: <https://www.jewish-music.huji.ac.il/he/content/אל-כוויתאי>
<https://www.jewish-music.huji.ac.il/content/salah-el-kuweiti>

Print information:

JMRC bio: <https://www.jewish-music.huji.ac.il/he/content/אל-כוויתאי>
<https://www.jewish-music.huji.ac.il/content/salah-el-kuweiti>

Dudu Tassa tells the story of the al-Kuwaitis (English)

<https://www.the-kuwaitis.com/assets/press/Songlines%20article.pdf>
<https://www.kqed.org/arts/128400/from-israel-a-jewish-singer-with-arab-roots-revives-the-music-of-his-familys-past>

<https://www.bac.org.il/specials/article/el-kweti> (Hebrew)

<https://www.haaretz.co.il/gallery/1.1180455> (Hebrew)

<https://bit.ly/3FtNvG0> (Hebrew)

<https://www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-440728,00.html>

<https://www.israelhayom.co.il/article/664481>

Dafna Dori, *The Al-Kuwaiti Brothers and the Iraqi Song (1930-1950)*, Ph.D. diss. University of Uppsala, 2021

<http://www.diva-portal.org/smash/record.jsf?pid=diva2%3A1516637&dswid=5551>

Hisqil Qassab, 1899-1969.

“Hisqil Kassab (1899-1969), one of the most famous Iraqi maqam reciters in the twentieth century. The title of pioneer of neoclassical singing in Maqam, and he is almost one of the most prominent Iraqi singers from among the Jews of Iraq.

“Hisqil Saul Qassab was born in Baghdad in the last decade of the nineteenth century. The exact year of his birth is not known, but some believe that his birth was in the year 1899. He immigrated to Israel after the Jews were deported from Iraq as a result of the Arab-Israeli conflict, where he continued reading the Maqam and recording songs on Israeli radio, until he died in Israel in 1969.” https://www.wikipe.wiki/wiki/ar/حسقىل_قصاب

Recordings of Hisqil Qassab on Esther Warkov’s YouTube channel with biographical information
<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCHKvj7fCrCwXBkCrnMmT69Q/>

Abraham Salman (Shaharabani), 1931-2014. Qanun virtuoso, considered one of the finest qanun players in the Middle East. Immigrated to Israel in 1950. Performed many styles: e.g. Iraqi, Turkish, mainstream/Egyptian, Hebrew songs, Western art music compositions arranged or composed for qanun. Brilliant improviser. Also played 'ud.

Recordings:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DnFEb9A5N20&t=1s> private recording in Salman's home with violinist Simon Shaheen. Includes four samai-s and four phenomenal taqasim. Recorded by Warkov in 1980.

Playlist of 90 videos created by Jonah Nelson

https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLyKc8qK_My7ph0Vqn-C5OBMLxvBR3COAW

Rare recordings of Salman playing 'ud: two taqasim (maqams bayat and siga, recorded 1970) Then six taqasim on the qanun: maqam nakriz (1970), hijaz kar (1964), ajam (1961), zanjuwan (1964), suznak (1961), nahawand (1973). Followed (at minute 32:16) by a piece for qanun and symphony (title/composer unknown), followed by Joseph Rabiah (a blind Iraqi-Jewish musician) taqsim rast on cello (1970) all recorded by Israel radio (tape compiled by NLI).

https://www.nli.org.il/he/items/NNL_MUSIC_AL000241027/NLI

Recordings suggested by the NLI:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yf4TgJvzul8>
<https://www.a.com/watch?v=pn7Ys6aCl7w>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yBTQlsZKH4A>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=260M1K6ic34>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UtK0UHFjdKc>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JfnwWQ4RQ8g> **
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2rxQXC8UAuo>
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VDdBld_Nm0A
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VgMCx-fdZPE>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yf4TgJvzul8>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VggAnGWZVxg>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UUSrOabRII8>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H7FdcugGIk>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4gbcZWt-cWE>

Print Information:

Obituary in *Point of No Return* <http://jewishrefugees.blogspot.com/2014/07/kanoon-player-abraham-salman-dies.html>

<https://bit.ly/3Bro4m2> Hebrew

<https://www.haaretz.co.il/gallery/music/1.2375448> (includes taqsim kurd)

Shohat, Ella. (2008). "The Buena Vista Baghdad Club." *In Jewish Topographies: Visions of Space, Traditions of Place*. Brauch Julia, Anna Lipphardt and Alexandra Nocke, eds. Aldershot, UK & Burlington, VT: Ashgate P. 314- 317

Salim Shibith (Salim Ha-Cohen), 1908-1981. Studied with Rashid al-Qundarji in Baghdad, was a vocalist at the Iraqi broadcast stations and later at the Israel Broadcasting Authority. Immigrated from Iraq in 1951. Performed only the Iraqi style.

Listen here to several maqamat performances:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCHKvj7fCrCwXBkCrnMmT69Q/videos>

For additional recordings of the musicians mentioned above, search the [Warkov collection](#) at the National Library of Israel. Catalogue in Hebrew.

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