Alberto Hemsi and Paul Ben-Haim:

Reinventing the Songs of the Sephardim

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Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of
Requirements for Master of Sacred Music Degree

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School of Sacred Music
New York, New York

January 2010
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CHAPTER 1: Introduction

The story of the Sephardim, who resided in Spain for more than a millennium until their expulsion and dispersion in the late fifteenth century, is one that raises many questions with regard to the formation, preservation, and even possible extinction of their identity. When assessing the defining characteristics of Sephardi identity there are many factors. Today Sephardim live, grow, and develop in diverse regions and countries. How does their birth place and environment impact their identity? Do they still identify closely with the customs, heritage and beliefs of their ancestors as taught to them by their family? What accounts for their strong ties to their history and culture? Will Sephardic tradition, which has been passed on from generation to generation for over five hundred years, continue to have an influence and leave its cultural imprint in the future?

Following the Spanish expulsion, many Sephardim clung to their Sephardi heritage and identity in the new countries in which they came to reside. Their Spanish identity was as important to them as their Jewish identity. This distinct Sephardic identity was still present in the early twentieth century in neighborhoods in places such as New York, Paris, and Jerusalem where Sephardic communities continued to exist. Joseph Nehama, a Sephardic historian and educator once wrote:

> The Spanish Jew hastens to reconstitute the streets of his native city, transferring thereto his language, his customs, his culinary habits, his worries and quarrels.

> Each regional group forms a small world unto itself on the side of other little worlds…one could almost say that he carries in his luggage his little fatherland.[1]

This Sephardic identity, however strong, was never rigid: Sephardim absorbed the cultural influences prevailing in the countries where they found refuge. Whether in Turkey, Morocco, Greece, Palestine or the countries of Western Europe, most Sephardim were able to maintain their identity while absorbing local elements from their new host cultures.

This phenomenon is seen through music. The Judeo-Spanish Song was one medium through which Spanish heritage and identity was kept alive for centuries.[2] These musical traditions were transmitted orally from generation to generation and, as it was passed on, it evolved, incorporating the musical tradition of the various host communities into which the Sephardim immigrated. Samuel Armistad, Joseph Silverman and Israel J. Katz; three renowned scholars in the field of the Judeo-Spanish song, comment about this evolution:

> The Romancero (a collection of Spanish ballads) is actually a dynamic and eclectic tradition drawn from a great variety of sources, both medieval and modern, Jewish, Christian, and Islamic, Hispanic, but also Balkan and Near Eastern, and indeed French and Italian as well…For all its seeming conservatism, it is essential, then to view the Sephardic ballad tradition – like any other – as a vital, dynamic creative phenomenon, forever involved in the ongoing process of becoming something different from what it was before.[3]

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[1] Mair Jose Benardete, *Hispanic Culture and Character of the Sephardic Jews* (Boulder, Colorado: Miner and Journal, Inc., 1953), p. 143.
[2] Samuel G. Armistad, Joseph H. Silverman and Israel J. Katz, *Judeo-Spanish Ballads from Oral Tradition* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1986), p. 3.
[3] Ibid. p. 4.

Political and cultural changes in the nineteenth and twentieth century confronted the Sephardim, challenging their tradition with a new reality. Following the changes in the social order brought about by the French Revolution and the gradual deterioration of the Ottoman Empire, many Sephardic communities were not only exposed to a wave of westernization but also experienced tremendous loss of economic wellbeing.[4] The devastation of many prominent Sephardic centers in Greece and Italy during the Second World War resulted in a major migration[5] from Europe and the Near East to the New World and Israel. In these new locations Sephardim made their new homes and Sephardi communities began to be profoundly influenced by the different values and modern technology they encountered. The societies in both America and in Israel were ones accustomed to absorbing large numbers of immigrants. The separatist psychology of the Sephardim, which kept their Spanish tradition alive for centuries, could not last long in these new countries. Although the old generation brought the culture, customs, and songs from their communities in the old world, the younger generation wanted to be part of the new, western world. Meir Jose Benardete, a prominent scholar and historian of Sephardic culture commented on the newer generation of immigrants in the new world: "the American-born generation or those who came to this country when quite

[4] Benardete, *Hispanic Culture*, p. 122.
[5] Ibid. p. 138.

young are drifting away from the language and customs of their fathers."[6] This new environment awakened urgency among scholars and those who carried the tradition, to preserve the old musical body which was at risk of being lost.

In order for the Judeo-Spanish song to survive in this new social context and new surroundings, a new and relevant purpose and new audiences needed to be found. Benardete beautifully observed that the old social context for the Spanish ballads no longer existed.

> The place of the ballad in the lives of the Spanish Jews must be treated for a clear idea of the persistence of the romances in an atmosphere most uncongenial to their preservation. For the re-creation of the background of these ballads, the lyrical outbursts, redolent of nostalgic undertones in the ballads they heard at weddings and parties, in the hushed hours of the night, beside baby's cradle, or at the feet of the dead, do not suffice. In the flush of their interest and enthusiasm the Spanish Jews and their sympathizers overlooked the communal environment in which these ballads were sung.[7]

The fear of losing the tradition because its purpose was no longer relevant moved individuals; artists, and scholars alike, Sephardim , Jewish or non-Jewish musicians, to find a new purpose and new contexts for this music. Those who cared to preserve the tradition, and those who were fascinated by this music, altered and enhanced it, in a way which allowed it to survive in different social and musical contexts. Due to these efforts, the music not only continued to grow and remain relevant, but also provided a channel for those engaged in it, whether as performer, composer or listener, to express their identity.

Critics would contest the authenticity of the synthesized music claiming that it was not really Sephardic. However, the concept of a more flexible

[6] Ibid. p. 146.
[7] Ibid. p. 14

perception of Judeo-Spanish song brought about a vast revival in its performance practice preventing its possible extinction. The synthesis between traditional song and modern elements has been mutually beneficial as preservation intersects with the birth of a new art form.

This thesis will illustrate how the Judeo-Spanish song became a vessel of expression for diverse artists who underwent completely different journeys, yet chose to define musical expression with the combination of Judeo-Spanish song and Western "Classical" music. For these musicians, this method of using a synthsized version of the Judeo-Spanish song was relevant to speak to audiences in the time and place in which they were inspired to write.

The first journey this thesis follows is that of the composer Alberto Hemsi, who was born in 1898 to a Sephardic family in Cassaba (Turgutlu) Turkey. His childhood was filled with the Judeo-Spanish music he heard at home and in his synagogue. As a young man, he traveled to study music professionally in a Western environment. Throughout his life, he lived in several centers of musical excellence, both in the Middle East and in Europe. He was therefore influenced by and exposed to many different styles of music and culture. It was extremely important for Hemsi as a scholar and as a Sephardic Jew to preserve the Sephardic melodies. As a composer and educator he had compelling aspirations for the integration of Sephardic music with Western elements.[8] He identified and

[8] Alberto Hemsi, *Cancionero Sefardi* (Jerusalem: The Jewish Music Research Centre-The Hebrew University, 1995), p. 29.

defined himself as a musician by the fusion of both Eastern and Western elements in his music. He believed that this synthesis would give new purpose to the Judeo-Spanish Song and would attract wider audiences.

The second journey will reveal a musical encounter from the opposite direction. Israeli composer Paul Ben-Haim, was born Paul Frankenburger in Munich, Germany, in 1897. He was educated and well established in Germany, both as a conductor and a composer. His encounter with the Judeo-Spanish song happened later in his career, after he immigrated to Palestine in 1933. Like Hemsi, he aspired to integrate Eastern and Western musical elements, but he chose to do so from a different viewpoint. For Ben-Haim, it was a search for a new kind of musical identity, one that would fit the new Mediterranean milieu of which he was becoming a part. Through his acquaintance and collaboration with the singer Bracha Zefira, Ben Haim encountered many different Mediterranean sounds, among them the Judeo-Spanish song. His compositions thus incorporated the many influences he encountered in Palestine.

These two biographies will serve as a paradigm for artistic expression in the first half of the 20th century in Israel and in Europe. This thesis will investigate the complex idea of identity where individuals can feel a part of many different worlds and be touched by several influences, yet combine all these factors to form their own identity, and the gestalt of who they are. We will see through the examples of these composers' lives and music how the Judeo-Spanish song is constantly evolving, developing, and changing. This thesis will

attempt to capture a certain moment in this evolution where the traditional folk song is synthesized with western music to create an innovative musical expression. These ideas may demonstrate how this phenomenon coud conitnue to occur in the future.

CHAPTER 2: Background: History of the Jews in Spain

The relationship of the Jewish people with the Iberian Peninsula may go as far back as King Solomon's kingdom in the tenth century BCE, but some form of Jewish existence in Spain can be traced to the third century CE.[9] The rapport of the Jews with the local civilization fluctuated greatly in different periods depending to a great extent on the leadership of the time. When Recared, the Visigoth monarch accepted Christianity in 586 CE, he ordered the Jews to either convert to Christianity or leave Christian Spain. Most chose to migrate to Moslem North Africa and only returned in the wake of Tariq ibn Ziyad's victory in 711. Upon their return to Spain, the Jews were permitted to practice their religion freely and flourish economically.[10] Due to its crucial geographic position between Western Europe and Northern Africa, the peninsula was a constant battleground between Christian and Moslem rulers. Jews occupied a lower status under both religions; however, they generally lived more comfortably and were able to thrive economically under Moorish dominance. In Islamic Spain, they were able to engage in mercantile, professional, and agricultural pursuits and were awarded titles of rank and high positions in the political hierarchy.[11]

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[9] Susana Weich-Shahak, *En Buen Siman: Panorama del Repertorio Musical Sefaradi,* (Israel: Pardes Publishing Company, 2006), p.13.
[10] Ibid. p. 13.
[11] Israel J. Katz, *Judeo-Spanish Traditional Ballads from Jerusalem: An Ethnomusicological Study.* Vol. I (New York: The Institute of Mediaeval Music, LTD. 1972), p. 2.

Later on, with transfer to Christian sovereigns in the 11th and 12th centuries, Jews continued for the most part to be treated with benevolence. Amicable relationships were interrupted in times of warfare and economic strife.[12] In times of poor leadership, whether Christian or Moslem, tensions tended to rise and the Jews were made to suffer from persecution and popular riots. Generally, when economic times improved, Jews enjoyed peace and prosperity.[13]

Jews, for the most part, lived in separate self-governed quarters called "alhamas." These independent communities were led by rabbis and democratically elected laymen from among wealthy and influential families.[14] They collected taxes and governed overall economic or educational matters. They also presided over judicial affairs whether criminal, ethical, or religious and imposed penalties such as fines or ex-communication.[15] This type of governance enabled them to integrate to the local society while maintaining their own strong autonomy and separate culture within the larger culture. The independence of the Jewish community, coupled with tolerance from leaders such as Abd Al Rahman III (882-942), caliph of Cordoba, gave rise to the Golden Age of Spain in the 10th century CE. Botany, geography, philosophy, literature, mathematics, medicine, and poetry flourished in communities in several Spanish cities such as

[12] Benardete, *Hispanic Culture,* p. 28.
[13] Weich-Shahak, *En Buen Siman,* p.14.
[14] Benardete, *Hispanic Culture*, p. 32.
[15] Weich-Shahak, *En Buen Siman*, p. 14.

Cordoba, Granada, and Toledo. Hasdai Ibn Shaprut, who was the court physician in Cordoba and a philosopher, was the patron of great thinkers such as Menachem ben Saruk, Donash Ben Labret and Shlomo Ibn Gabirol. Ben Saruk and Ben Labret engaged in a deep argument about language, following a biblical lexicon Ben Saruk wrote, which may have contradicted rabbinical interpretations of the bible. Ben Labrat, Ibn Gabirol as well as the notable Judah Halevi wrote many liturgical poems that still can be found in our daily and holiday liturgy. Other significant figures in this period Moses Ibn Ezra and Abraham Ibn Ezra contributed numerous philosophical works consisting of complex discussions of God and interpretation of rabbinic literature and the bible.[16] In addition to their contribution of original works, Sephardim were active as translators from Hebrew to Arabic and from Arabic to the romantic languages. They played a part in the development of the Spanish language.[17] By the 11th century, the Jews had developed a partnership with the Spanish language and culture that was to last hundreds of years following their expulsion from Spain.[18]

However, even in this period of great progress and intellectual affluence, the Jews' fate fluctuated between waves of tolerance and terrible persecution from Moslems and Christians alike. In the 12th century, the Berber Dynasty of the Almohads abandoned the liberal culture of *Al-Andalus* and took to oppressing the Jews. Later, in the 13th century, as Christian reconquista armies

[16] Ibid. p. 14.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Benardete, *Hispanic Culture,* p. 19.

entered Cordoba and Seville, Jews were suspected by both sides of disloyalty and were forced to convert.[19] Following anti-Jewish riots in 1391, some Jewish communities were completely destroyed and many Jews converted to Christianity, some by force, others by choice. This, however, did not stop the suspicion and the Inquisition was set up to seek out the conversos who were accused of clandestine Jewish practices.[20]

In 1469, the kingdoms of Castile and Aragon were united through the marriage of Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand. In 1492 after conquering Granada, the last Moslem kingdom in Spain, the two monarchs decided to expel all Jews who refused to convert to Christianity. They either perceived the presence of unconverted Jews as a hindrance to the integration of the Marranos – the New Christians – into the Spanish society, or they sought to seize the Jews' wealth. An additional reason was due to popular religious fanaticism.[21] A similar decree was passed in Portugal in 1497. Approximately 200,000 Jews thus left the lands where they had lived for a thousand years. They fled to Western Europe, the New World, North Africa and the Near East where they referred to themselves as Sephardim. Sephardim is the name that derives from the ancient Hebrew word for Spain – Sepharad.

[19] Katz, *Judeo-Spanish Traditional Ballads,* p. 3.
[20] Weich-Shahak, *En Buen Siman,* p.16.
[21] Ibid. p. 17.

The Sephardim: Post-Expulsion History

The Sephardim who fled to Western Europe and the New World quickly abandoned their Spanish heritage. However, in the Ottoman Empire and in North Africa, particularly in Morocco, they preserved their Sephardic legacy.[22] In the Ottoman Empire, they were welcomed with open arms. They were permitted to practice their professions, especially in international trade, printing and medicine as well as to move about freely. "They left a country burgeoning with creative sap and entered a region under the dominion of a power at the zenith of its conquests."[23] By providing much needed skills and services, they were able to integrate successfully into the local economy and culture. [24]

In addition to material well being, in their new homes, the Sephardim were free to exercise their religion. Their synagogues bore the names of the Spanish cities they had left. They also practiced the Spanish rite and absorbed the smaller, culturally less advanced existing communities.[25] These separate and self-sufficient units were governed by the concept of Ascamotocracy: A community ruled by freely elected officials who run the affairs of society in conjunction with rabbinical authorities according to Jewish law. Much as in Spain, these Sephardic Jewish communities were autonomous in affairs of the synagogue, the market

[22] Katz, *Judeo-Spanish Traditional Ballads,* pp. 4-5.
[23] Benardete, *Hispanic Culture,* pp. 66-68, 72.
[24] Katz, *Judeo-Spanish Traditional Ballads,* p. 5.
[25] Benardete, *Hispanic Culture,* p. 63.

place, and the home.[26] Judeo-Spanish, a language drawn from medieval Castillian Spanish and heavily influenced by Hebrew, Arabic and Aramaic, was spoken and spread to the Jewish communities throughout the Ottoman Empire. Ultimately, their love of their language prevented them from blending in with the local Jewish communities. Furthermore, The invention of the printing press made possible the dissemination of Judeo-Spanish works to the Jewish populations and kept the Spanish component of Sephardic culture alive.[27] This autonomy to govern and practice freely paired with the love and nostalgia for their Spanish language and culture is the reason for the survival of an oral tradition rich with customs and music. Despite their intellectual and spiritual wealth, the Sephardim felt an urgent need to fathom the reason for the expulsion. The traditional Jewish belief that suffering is a punishment for sin was an explanation for many. However, some historians found in the expulsion a message of hope and anticipation. This notion, as well as the coming of the half-millennium gave rise to mystic ideas within Judaism and many intellectuals turned increasingly to the study of the Zohar and Kabbalah in order to understand the significance of their exile.[28] The Zohar, a commentary on the stories of the Torah that was written in 12th century Spain, was popularized in

[26] Ibid. p. 70.
[27] Jane S. Gerber, *The Jews of Spain:: A History of the Sephardic Experience* (Toronto, Canada: The Free Press – A Division of Macmillan, Inc., 1992), p. 161.
[28] Ibid. p. 172.

this period with the help of the printing press and reaffirmed messianic hopes. In its pages, the Sephardic exiles found depth, consolation, and great promise.[29]

The center of Jewish mysticism was Safed in the Galilean hills of Israel. Isaac Luria went beyond the Zohar to create a new form of Kabbalah infused with messianic meaning. His theology asserted that the suffering of the exiled Jews served a purpose. These doctrines appealed to a wide audience of his generation in the mid 17th century and stirred the messianic hopes of the Jewish people. Jewish mysticism in Safed also produced some of the finest poems ever written in Hebrew by poets such as Solomon Halevi Alcabetz, and Israel Najara.

1648 was a crucial year for the advent of the Messiah. Ashkenazi refugees flooded Istanbul in the wake of the massacres by Chmielnitski's Cossack hordes.[30] By the 1660s the false messiah Sabbetai Zvi gained a large following among Jews for reasons beyond his charisma and power of song.[31] Many of his gestures and announced reforms violated the norms of Judaism.[32] The Muslim authorities, alarmed by the implications of Zvi's mass movement, forced him to convert to Islam. However, Nathan of Gaza, a devout follower, explained Zvi's apostasy as part of his messianic role. Though the majority of his followers returned to their original traditional faith, his apostasy encouraged some Jews to

[29] Benardete, *Hispanic Culture,* p. 75.
[30] Gerber, *The Jews of Spain,* p. 173.
[31] Benardete, *Hispanic Culture,* p. 108.
[32] Gerber, *The Jews of Spain,* p. 173.

convert to Islam and continued to agitate within the Sephardic community for many years.

Zvi's death in 1676 left the Jews in a state of confusion and dejection. As a result they were subjected to derision throughout the Empire.[33] The affair left Ottoman Jewry in a state of deep psychological depression as well as cultural and economic regression. Benardete characterized Zvi's pseudo-messianic movement as the single most significant and disturbing event of Sephardic history during the 17th century.

It was only with the subsequent publication of the compendium of the *Meam Loez* in the 18th century, he noted, that Sephardic culture found redemption. This popular encyclopedia, written in Judeo-Spanish, assembled passages from the Bible, the Talmud, the Zohar, and other rabbinical literature. It was largely responsible for the preservation of the language and contributed to a spiritual renewal of Sephardic Jewry.[34] However, at this point, the Ottoman Empire suffered a long period of decline. Jews began to look towards the West as Sephardic destiny shifted to Europe and beyond.[35]

The loss of economic well being coupled with the Westernization of the Mediterranean countries, led to the deterioration of the Judeo-Spanish language and culture. Under the Ottoman rule, the Sephardim had no need to learn the languages of the territories that emerged as countries in the 19th century. With

[33] Katz, *Judeo-Spanish Traditional Ballads,* p. 9.
[34] Ibid. p. 11.
[35] Gerber, *The Jews of Spain,* p. 175.

the new political situation, they were bound to acquire knowledge of the respective languages.[36] Many Jews of the Mediterranean world emigrated to Western Europe and the New World because of the awakening nationalism in the region.[37]

The Sephardic communities that remained in the East experienced a period of profound physical decay. They had never recovered from the disappointment of Zvi's messianic promise and subsequently turned more and more toward mysticism. Many spiritual leaders counseled a fatalistic kind of humility and dignity in the face of extreme poverty and abuse. What little remained of Judeo-Spanish culture was tainted by superstition and fanaticism. This state of mind was far removed from the philosophy and science treasured by their predecessors.[38]

The emancipated Jews of Western Europe eventually brought regeneration and progressivism to their brethren in the East through Western technology, ideologies, and education. The *Alliance Israelite Universelle,* a French Jewish organization, established schools throughout the Mediterranean and North Africa for the purpose of educating and protecting the Jewish communities as well as infusing them with Western ideas.[39] Sephardic culture

[36] Benardete, *Hispanic Culture*, p. 122.
[37] Ibid. p. 140.
[38] Gerber, *The Jews of Spain,* p. 223.
[39] Ibid. p. 215.

enjoyed a last revival of literature in Ladino, French, and Hebrew.[40] Nevertheless, since the Sephardic Jews had never really experienced the radical reforms of Western Europe, modernization caused a Jewish identity crisis. Many felt the loss of essential tradition as they were alienated from their culture without a clearly defined new identity.[41]

By the turn of the 20th century, many Sephardic Jews from the various parts of the Ottoman Empire and North Africa emigrated to Palestine and America. At the conclusion of World War I, the old Empires of Europe were in ruins. Due to prevailing nationalist sentiments and rising anti-Semitic persecutions, Jews followed economic opportunity and sought protection and religious freedom in the newly independent states.[42] With the outbreak of WWII, and Nazi persecution of Jews everywhere, the entire Jewish world was in danger of death and destruction. Many Jewish communities of the former Ottoman Empire such as the community of Salonika were almost completely annihilated.

The scope of the Holocaust could not be absorbed or comprehended; the obliteration of entire Sephardic communities in Western Europe, the Balkans, Italy, Greece, Turkey, left a gaping hole. In the Arab world, countless numbers of Jews were murdered by violent mobs and communities devastated in pogroms. Therefore, as soon as immigration restrictions were lifted, Sephardim rushed to leave the Arab countries as well as war-torn Europe. They immigrated to

[40] Ibid. p. 245.
[41] Ibid. p. 241.
[42] Ibid p. 243.

Palestine (later, Israel), France or America where the largest Sephardic population lives today.

CHAPTER 3: The Judeo-Spanish Song

The Judeo-Spanish song is a testimony to the Sephardic communities' way of life in medieval Spain as well as a reflection on the different influences on the Sephardic community living in exile.[43] Generally, since music is an expression of a society and its culture, it can be explored for a better understanding of various aspects of that culture. Music not only accompanies and enhances major events in a given cultural tradition; it plays a vital role in social life and the culture as a whole. The sharing of similar experiences and satisfactions from the same tune provides a sense of security and identity with the group.[44] Among the Sephardim, music and song were passed on orally from generation to generation, accompanying religious and life cycle events; they are an integral part of Sephardic life.[45]

The Judeo-Spanish song tradition was preserved in exile due to the way Jewish community life was structured. Jews lived in a separate section of the town that was assigned to them. They functioned as a small, self-governing nation within a larger one with their own laws, schools, cemeteries, and synagogues.[46] This accounts, in part, for their strong ties to their history and culture. An additional reason for maintaining the ancient vernacular was their

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[43] Weich-Shahak, *En Buen Siman,* p. 20.
[44] Amnon Shiloah & Erik Cohen, "The Dynamics of Change in Jewish Oriental Ethnic Music in Israel," *Ethnomusicology*, Vol. 27, No. 2 (1983), p. 228.
[45] Katz, *Judeo-Spanish Traditional Ballads*, p. 18.
[46] William Samelson, "Romances and Songs of the Sephardim," in R.D. Barnett (Ed.) *The Sephardi Heritage* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 1971), p. 532.

desire to chant the classical Romances of Spain which the Sephardim subsequently incorporated into daily events related to the family and community. These songs served as lullabies, as moral reflection in the retelling of the feats of famous heroes, occasions of honoring a special guest, or everyday celebrations such as the cutting of an infant's tooth.[47]

In the late 19th and early 20th century, scholars began collecting Spanish Romances with the intent of tracing their origin. Another motivation of collectors was to preserve the melodies that had been passed down orally through notation and recording.[48] Much of the Judeo-Spanish song that was uncovered belonged to the Spanish Romancero (collection of ballads). Scholars sought to determine whether this repertoire dated from medieval, pre-expulsion Spain or was the product of the various influences the Jews absorbed in exile following their expulsion from Spain in 1492.[49] The oldest printed notation of a Judeo-Spanish Ballad appeared in a Viennese Journal in 1897.[50] This evidence is not sufficient to show with certainty that any tune actually descended from medieval Spain. However, the studies and discoveries by the Israeli scholar Hanoch Avnery,[51] make us understand that Sephardim were able to maintain and preserve a

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[47] Ibid. p. 533.
[48] Katz, *Judeo-Spanish Traditional Ballads,* p. 30.
[49] Samuel G. Armistead, "New Perspectives in Judeo-Spanish Ballad Research," *Sephardi and Oriental Jewish Heritage* (Misgav Yerushalayaim: The Magness Press, The Hebrew University, 1982), p. 226-7.
[50] Katz, *Judeo-Spanish Traditional Ballads,* p. 30.
[51] Armistead, New Perspectives, p. 226.

substantial portion of their pre-exile ballad repertoire in the *piyyut contrafacta* of Romance melodies.[52] This means that *piyyutim* – liturgical poems -- were chanted to the melody of an old Spanish ballad for the purpose of memorizing or reciting the text. This can be seen by comparing parallels with non-Jewish medieval Spanish repertoire.

The texts of the Spanish romance or ballad originate in the *Cantares de gesta* of 12th century France.[53] They developed into epic poems whose role was to extol the deeds of heroes: kings, knights, wealthy noblemen, or lowly cavaliers. In the course of time, the epic poems became the property of the masses. People retained fragments of them they deemed important and in turn passed them from father to son, mother to daughter.[54] Sephardic Jewry perpetuated the Spanish Romancero but rejected the motifs of the Christian Romance that reminded them of the unpleasant aspects of life in their former homeland. They excised subjects which were not in religious or ethical accord with their own customs and drew on those that had special appeal for them as Israelites.[55] Handwritten Judeo-Spanish ballads first appeared in the early 1700's in the Eastern Mediterranean and became abundant by the end of the 18th century.[56]

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[52] Ibid., p. 226.
[53] Samelson, "Romances and Songs of the Sephardim", p. 527.
[54] Ibid. p. 528.
[55] Ibid. p. 531.
[56] Samuel G. Armistead and Joseph H. Silverman, "The Judeo-Spanish Ballad Tradition," *Oral Tradition* Vol. 2, No. 2-3 (1987), p. 634.

Two traditions developed: the Eastern Mediterranean and the North African, each with distinctive characteristics. In the East, the texts became shorter and the ballad music was assimilated with the Balkan-Near Eastern musical idiom. Narrative themes and stylistic features were borrowed from traditional Greek, Turkish, and Arabic poetry. However, the ballad language remained archaic and preserved phonological features of medieval Spanish. In Morocco, ballad texts are remarkably close to their 16th century peninsular congeners. The music is Hispanic and Western in character and its language is assimilated with a modern Andalusian colloquial Spanish.[57]

As the Jews preserved this tradition, the Spanish Romance absorbed many new stylistic features and evolved into a heterogeneous repertoire. It coalesced as one tradition under a common heritage of the pre-exilic Spanish Romance. However, the interpenetration during the post-exilic period and intermingling of traditions have made it quite difficult to trace the transformations to either before or after the expulsion.[58] Furthermore, close contact of Iberian, Turkish, and Sephardic influences make it difficult to identify the different influences under a common Mediterranean aesthetics.[59]

The collectors of the Judeo-Spanish Song uncovered a rich repertoire consisting of a huge body of thousands of melodies. The song's character was

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[57] Ibid.
[58] Judith Etzion & Susana Weich-Shahak, "'Family Resemblances' and Variability in the Sephardic Romancero: A Methodological Approach to Variantal Comparison," *Journal of Music Theory* Vol. 37 No. 2 (1993), p. 267-8.
[59] Hemsi, *Cancionero Sefardi,* p. 43.

studied and categorized by type and use. The traditional song is a vocal melody, monodic, modal, and without accompaniment, except for an occasional drum. It is highly improvisatory, free and informal. The melody is either syllabic or mellismatic, ranges around a 6th or 7th ambitus and ascends and descends mostly by conjoint degrees. The musical phrase ends in an adorned and at times modulatory descent to the final tonic as ending cadence.

The performer is expected to show virtuosity and improvisational skill by infusing the words with an emotive quality. Therefore, the rhythm is not fixed; its function is to serve the prosodic accents of the words. The music enhances the story told in the poem regardless of bars; the words and the silences create the order, and the *melismas* express the performer's emotions.[60]

Three main categories define the classical Judeo-Spanish Song according to textual, musical, and anthropological considerations: The Romancero, the Cancionero and the Coplas. The Romancero is a collective term denoting a compendium of Romanzas or ballads. This category, thought to be the most ancient, has primarily been of interest to academic scholars. It is estimated to have originated around the 10th to the 12th century – coinciding with what has been termed "the golden age of Spain." The Romances are epic poems telling stories of heroes: knights, kings and queens, court affairs, and adulteresses. Some recount the wars between ancient kingdoms and the stories of captives during the era of the Reconquista. The structure of the Romance is such that the melody

[60] Ibid. pp. 42-44.

embraces verses of sixteen syllables or two hemistiches of eight syllables each. They do not necessarily rhyme at the end of phrases but the rhythm is the same throughout and the music is strophic. There is tension between the structure of the text and the structure of the melody as the text follows the rhythm of each hemistich while the melody follows a strophic form.

Most melodies are tranquil, pleasing and unaccompanied. The Romances were mostly sung by women and used as lullabies. Even if the topic was adultery, deceit or betrayal, they were used to pacify a baby and make it go to sleep. Remembering every single phrase without skipping any part of the plot kept the singing mother awake. The older children were likely to gather around absorbing the fascinating story, which was thus passed on through them. Some songs were used differently such as the theme of the loyal wife, which were customarily sung at weddings.[61]

The second type of song, the cancionero, also called cantiga, cantica, or cantares, consists of lyrical songs whose texts and melodies are built on a strophic pattern. The music complements the text and at times there would be a repeating refrain. The cancionero deals mostly with emotions: love, disappointment, and yearning. Its structure has four phrases with alternating rhyme (every other phrase). The verses are not necessarily connected and unlike in the Romance, the plot is not epic. The sequence of the poetry is not necessary but can be formed from either parallelism between verses or by accumulative

[61] Weich-Shahak, *En Buen Siman,* p. 27.

forms (such as Chad Gadya, or One who knows one – חד גדיא, אחד מי יודע) which are based on retroactive repetition.

The melodies follow the musical style of the time and place of their composition and adopted both melodic and rhythmic elements of their Surroundings along the way. These played an important role in life cycle events accompanying one from the cradle to the grave. They were used for rites of passage such as wedding ceremonies. Less so than the Romances, they too were used as lullabies. Sometimes children used them in recitations or play songs. Some were lyrical love songs, courting songs and mourning songs referred to as *Endechas*. On the last, there were groups of women who specialized in lamenting and tell of the bitterness and miseries of life. The accumulative songs were also sung at the Seder in order to lengthen the ceremony as is recommended by Halachah.[62]

The third type of song, the Coplas, is uniquely a Jewish genre. These songs express the beliefs, ideas, and principles of the Sephardim and reflect as well on the social and economic changes they endured in exile. The fact that these songs appeared in print indicates that they were performed by men since women could not read. The structure of the songs shows a thematic connection between the verses which were at times anchored by an acrostic, either in alphabetic order or spelling out the name of the poet. Their purpose was to transmit an educational or ethical message for either the individual or the

[62] Ibid. p. 59

community to heed. Some served the yearly cycle of religious holidays and others were specific to life cycle events. The subject matter of many of those that were sung around the holidays drew on the Bible or Talmud for religious educational purposes. Others were meant to rebuke or give advice. Others still were comments on events in the community or on economic issues.[63]

These three types fall under the rubric of classical Sephardic songs. In the 19th and 20th century the Sephardim continued to write and create songs. However, these do not necessarily fit into the above three categories. They continued to evolve and create new, innovative genres that reflected on the issues and matters affecting their contemporary community, while still using Judeo-Spanish to express themselves. However, as the world changed at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century and Sephardic culture was increasingly influenced by the West, the Sephardic song too underwent changes.

Modernity and the spread of Westernization in the Eastern countries led to changes in the preservation, transmission, and evolution of the traditional Sephardic song. The younger generation was increasingly swayed by outside influences.[64] The introduction of Western educational institutions changed the way music was taught and sung. Harmony and new instruments were introduced, causing alterations in the original interaction between artist and

[63] Ibid. p. 93
[64] Hemsi, *Cancionero Sefardi*, p. 46.

song. The old way of intimate expression in a lullaby gave way to stage and concert performances. The emphasis moved from virtuosity and improvisation to rhythmic and metric compositions that needed to be notated for an ensemble.[65]

The following chapters will explore the works of two early 20th century composers, Alberto Hemsi and Paul Ben-Haim, who fused the elements of the traditional Sephardic song with Western musical concepts and styles. The journey of their lives was as diverse as their reasons for engaging in this type of composition. Both aimed to elevate or "aestheticize" the traditional song from folk music to "fine art" in the concert hall.[66] However, they are but two examples of this phenomenon that attracted many composers in that time period. In the fusion of eastern and western musical styles, Hemsi and Ben-Haim found a powerful instrument through which to give expression to their own identity as well as to the spirit of their time.

[65] Shiloah & Cohen, The Dynamics of Change, p. 232.
[66] Ibid. p. 243

CHAPTER 4: Alberto Hemsi: Preservation and Recreation

Alberto Hemsi (1897 - 1975) is one of the most celebrated musicians in the field of Sephardic folklore. His colossal contribution to Judeo-Spanish song has been twofold: as a collector, he devoted much of his life to preserving the treasure of the Sephardic folk song; and as a composer, he produced expert and innovative compositions, which have made this repertoire known to audiences of all ages and diverse social conditions.[67]

Alberto Hemsi was born in 1897 to Sephardic parents of Italian nationality in Cassaba (known today as Turgutlu) in the Aegean region (or the province of Smyrna in Turkey) of the former Ottoman Empire. He began his schooling at the *Alliance Israélite Universelle* and in 1913 was sent by the *Société Musicale Israélite de Smyrne* to study composition with Shem Tov Shikayar and Chazzanut with Rabbi Yitzchak Algazi. In 1914 he was accepted into the Royal Conservatory of Music in Milan and studied theory, piano, counterpoint and composition with the great professors of his day. During World War I, he served in the Italian army as an infantry officer. Due to an injury to his right arm, he could no longer become a pianist and therefore focused more on composition.[68]

Sephardic music was the music of Hemsi's ancestors and was passed on to him orally either by his grandmother, who sang to him in his childhood, or by the hazzan who sang in the synagogue of Cassaba. However, he became aware of

[67] Katz, *Judeo-Spanish Traditional Ballads,* p. 70.
[68] Hemsi, *Cancionero Sefardi*, p. 12.

the need to collect his people's music during a music history class at the Royal Conservatory. His professor, the renowned Giusto Zampieri, exclaimed that although the Jewish people had a universal influence on all musical genres—vocal and instrumental—there was no possibility to play any of the melodies because none of them survived. Hemsi was shocked to learn that there should be no documentation of the music of his ancestors and that the only Jewish music the professor seemed to be familiar with was biblical chant. This experience and the love of Sephardic music and heritage inspired Hemsi to dedicate his life to collecting the music of his people, making sure that it survived and was passed on in modern contexts that would continue to be relevant in the future.

The first phase of Hemsi's collecting expedition took place between 1923 and 1927, when he visited Turkish and Greek Jewish centers as well as the Dodecanese islands, particularly Rhodes. Hemsi sought out and collected material from Sephardim of the older generation who carried tunes that had been taught to them orally. Such people are referred to by scholars as informants. During this period, in addition to his extensive work as a collector, Hemsi composed five installments of *Coplas Sefardies,* each designated by an opus number. Each opus consists of six songs that originated in a particular Sephardic community. Although they were named *coplas*, many of them were actually *romances*.[69] Hemsi was musically educated in western schools and styles and therefore composed rich arrangements of Sephardic folk songs within a

[69] Katz, *Judeo-Spanish Traditional Ballads*, p. 69.

European framework. He began composing with his Sephardic musical heritage and fused it with elements taken from Western musical traditions to produce works of an essentially innovative, heterogeneous character. Along with composers such as Bela Bartok and Ralph Vaughan Williams, Hemsi was one of many artists categorized as "aestheticizing" folk music and elevating traditional styles to the rank of the concert hall. Such composers transposed traditional tunes into new, fine-art compositions with a folk flavor. This musical style represented a balance of stylistic plurality and fusion.[70]

In 1928, the Jewish community of Alexandria in Egypt offered Hemsi the position of musical director of Temple Eliahou Hanabi.[71] During his twenty years of service at this synagogue, he also served as professor of harmony and composition at the Verdi Conservatory in Alexandria. From this position, Hemsi publicly expressed strong views about music education, aesthetics, and composition. He took an active role in the musical discussion going on at the time about Arabic music and its influences from the West: he was also outspoken about his philosophies on the value of bringing the music worlds of the East and West together. He believed that renowned musicians in Europe should come to Egypt for the purpose of education as well as performance. He also thought that

[70] Shiloah & Cohen, the Dynamics of Change, p. 243.
[71] Hemsi, *Cancionero Sefardi*,p. 12.

"Oriental Motifs" and quarter tones should be used in composition but that the harmonies, method and framework should be Western.[72]

In the 1930's, Hemsi composed music for the synagogue as well as secular Sephardic music. His compositions were based partly on the melodies he collected from different Jewish centers in the Ottoman Empire and from informants who visited him in Alexandria. Following the devastation of World War II, in which Hemsi personally lost several family members, and after Nasser's rise to power, which brought rising tensions between Jews and Arabs, Hemsi left Alexandria to settle in Paris with his family in 1957. He embarked on another musical career in two Sephardic synagogues—Berith Shalom and Don Isaac Abravanel—and became professor of musical liturgy at the *Seminaire Israélite de France.* He remained in these positions until his death in 1975. Through his ongoing research into the Sephardic tradition, he tried to specifically identify influences and sources of the music, e.g. Iberian, Turkish, or Sephardi. It is likely that these strains influenced one another in such a way that it became difficult to identify with certitude one source rather than another. They all had a "Mediterranean aesthetic" to them; some used the Eastern modes, or *maqam*, and rhythms, while others had melodic features similar to Western modes.[73] Research done by Manuel de Falla on music called *Canto Jondo*—the music of Andalusia (a region in Spain close to Seville, where Jewish civilization thrived prior to the

[72] Ibid. p. 29.
[73] Ibid. p. 43.

Expulsion)—also showed similar elements to the old Sephardic repertoire Hemsi had collected. Therefore, it is possible that there might have been influences in both directions between the Sephardic repertoire and the non-Jewish *Canto Jondo* of the Andalusians.

In his compositions, Hemsi took great care not to force harmonies that would alter the character of the original melodies. He aimed to maintain the original temperament of the folk song while creating a completely original atmosphere by adding rich textures to his compositions. His intention was to re-create the traditional spirit of the people and the context that he feared would be lost because it was no longer practiced by the newer generations. In the beginning of the 20th century, it was already becoming apparent that the younger generation was not able to transmit the tradition of the older generation due to the many prevailing outside influences either from the West or from the Arab world.

Although Hemsi himself was educated and steeped in Western music, he was also influenced by the Arabic and Turkish music of the host culture when he lived in Egypt. Sephardic music was often sung at social functions that no longer existed in the same way as in the past. Also, the songs that were transmitted orally from generation to generation probably changed, evolved and could be influenced by the personal temperament of the performer. Hemsi was concerned that too much influence of outside cultures in his time would change the traditional folk tunes. The newer generations had already been strongly

influenced by westernization and by the forces of modernization that had been introduced into the Ottoman Empire. In this modern, westernized style, the music was precisely notated, as were the ornaments; the freedom to improvise and embellish was greatly reduced. As we will see through an analysis of one of his *Coplas*, Hemsi added another layer of western influence to the Sephardic music he loved while remaining strongly cognizant of retaining many original characteristics of the source material.

The song "*El rey por muncha madruga. . .,*" from his *Coplas Sefardies* Opus 8, is from the second of the two "Rodas" books he collected during the years 1924 to 1927. In Hemsi's *Cancionero Sefardi* [CS], this song is called "*Landarico"* and it is from the *romancero* genre. According to his own notes in CS, this song was so popular that it was actually known throughout all the Sephardi communities of Asia Minor from Jerusalem to Sofia, passing through Bursa, Rhodes and Istanbul.[74] Hemsi had gathered five different literary versions of the text and two musical ones. The literary versions develop the same plot with certain variations.

This text is a folk tale influenced by the Arabic secular oral tradition. The ballad is about a queen who has a lover. One day the king visits the queen in her chamber as she is combing her hair. The queen, thinking it is her lover, speaks of her consuming love for him, describing in detail their forbidden children and stating her preference to them over the king's children. When she opens her eyes, she is shocked to discover that it is not her lover but the king. She tries to cover

[74] Ibid. p. 143.

for her mistake but it is too late, as the king had already found out about her deceit. He announces that she will now have to wear a white dress and a red necklace, which was worn by those who were sentenced to death.

It is interesting to look at the two versions of the melodies Hemsi collected and see the similarities and differences between them. The similarities are striking: both melodies are in 3/8 rhythm and are intensely rhythmic, whereas the singing of most *romances* is usually slow and recitative like, almost on the verge of declamation. This might be due to the drama that unfolds in the text and the constant tension regarding what will become of the queen. Additionally, it was the custom to compose distinct melodies for the purpose of remembering the ballad texts. It is, therefore, quite natural that the melody that survived has much intensity to it. Both melodies have the same tonality in G minor, the same number of bars and the same type of repetition of the two hemistiches of the first verse. The difference lies in the reprise of the second hemistich, which does not repeat in exactly the same way.

There are differences in how the melodies are sung, but it is only in the contours of the melody. Every phrase in all the different versions ends in the same way and all the ends of the musical phrases descend quickly in conjoint steps to the G, which is the tonic. This aesthetic of the descending phrase in conjoint steps with embellishments toward the tonic is characteristic of the genre, common to Mediterranean people's music and diametrically opposed to Western

music.[75] Similarly, following the style of the genre, the melody here spans an ambitus, or pitch range, of a 7th and the phrases progress by steps of a tone or half tones; there are no sudden jumps. The 16th notes in the melody contribute to the intensity of the melody, especially with the notes that repeat consecutively. It gives the melody an impression of driving energy, which is also why it is not felt like a slow recitative, but an intensely rhythmic melody. The fact that the two melodies collected are extremely similar is also testimony to the fact that this song is older and traveled through countries, not changing much from one place to another.

When looking at Hemsi's adaptation of this *romance* folk melody, it is immediately apparent that the composition is a sophisticated art song. Remarkably, the melody is kept untouched as it appears in the first version he collected (AABB, rather than the second version AABC). The song also retains the concept of identical musical verses that repeat themselves to the different texts, as well as the fact that each verse is built on two musical phrases that repeat twice, as in the original folk melody. But, by adding several new dimensions to his composition, Hemsi infused this *romance* with tremendous drama, passion and intensity. The entire story that's told in the text is painted in his composition as if painting a picture. Even though there are more verses in the text than the composition, the drama of the story unfolds within the three composed verses.

[75] Ibid. p. 46.

Before the melody appears, Hemsi sets up the scene with a long two-part introduction. The beginning of the introduction is a ten-measure segment that Hemsi indicates should be played slowly and gravely, suggesting the queen quietly combing her hair. It borrows melodic and rhythmic motifs from the folk melody, but the time signature is 3/4 rather than 3/8. The subtle dissonances in the harmony signal the drama that is approaching. Slowing slightly, the introduction descends to a low D, rather than ending on the tonic, which is G. The descending bass to the tonic in Eastern music is a common way to cadence or have a phrase normally end. But here, Hemsi descends down to the 5th or dominant, which leaves the listener suspended, ready to be launched into the drama to come.

In measure 11, the drama descends as the temperament changes and the tempo and the rhythmic motive that accompanies most of the rest of the piece is established. This strongly Spanish-sounding rhythmic motive—also known as Habanera rhythm—is two measures long at first and uses elements from the motives in the melody; alternating between one quarter and four sixteenth notes in the first measure and then three eighth notes in the second measure. The range used in the piano is mostly in the lower register at first and reminiscent of a guitar. Together, the rhythm and subtle, harmonic dissonances (such as the rippling of G, D, E-flat and A in the second measure of the Allegretto) create a

very intense yet sensual dramatic mood as well as an infectious dancelike motion.

The rhythmic pattern in this new, dramatic section, an eighth-note followed by two sixteenth-notes, is actually just a compression of the rhythmic pattern from measures 5 to 8 of the previous slow section, a quarter-note followed by two eighth-notes. The rhythmic element of one long note followed by two short notes is the same. Since the tempo is also much faster this brilliant echo is almost imperceptible to the listener. A crescendo ensues and in measure 17, the rhythm changes to all sixteenth notes, augmenting the push to the climax of this section in measure 18—where the rhythm slows to eighth notes and there is a *sforzando* on a powerfully dissonant rolled chord on beat two. This eighth-note pattern continues while melodically descending in pitch as well as dynamic level until finally in measures 22-23 there are groupings of just two eighth notes. In the context of the 3/8 time signature, it effects a hemiola sensation for just a moment, producing an unstable sensation emotionally. This continued rhythmic diminution, as well as the decrescendo that accompanies it, creates the sense of something approaching—a danger perhaps (as the text suggests). Finally the rhythmic pattern of the introduction culminates in a series of loud, accented sixteenth notes that sound harsh and brash, reminiscent of a flamenco dancer clapping. All of this build-up of intensity takes place before the actual singing of the folk melody begins.

As the first verse commences, the rhythmic accompaniment begins again as it did in the introduction, keeping the dance-like feeling, the intense drama and the strong flow and forward-moving support of the melody. The melody is structured in such a way that the musical embellishments or ornaments appear in the ultimate or penultimate syllable of the corresponding melody section. This is typical of Eastern ballads.[76] At the end of the first verse, an instrumental segment (measures 45 to 48) follows the rhythmic pattern, descending melody and dynamic level as in measures 18 to 23. But this time, instead of leading to the abrupt sixteenth notes, Hemsi returns to the slow, somber mood created in the introduction in measures 5 to 9, repeating the same rhythmic and harmonic motives.

The second verse begins in a completely different manner than the first verse. Even though the melody is exactly the same, and the rhythmic element from the first verse is retained in the same way, its character is completely different because the entire accompaniment is moved up to the higher register of the piano and we're now primarily in the relative major key of B-flat. The result is a truly majestic feeling, and the use of *staccato* notes creates the sensation of moving toward a climax. Perhaps this represents the feminine character and royalty of the queen in her chambers all the while that the drama is still present in the repeated rhythmic pattern.

[76] Katz, *Judeo-Spanish Traditional Ballads,* p. 77.

The interlude between the second and third verses lacks the slow passage of the previous verses; however, it does retain the repeating, habanera rhythmic pattern that has accompanied the piece all along. Interestingly, it is the only time Hemsi uses double forte in the entire piece. This is the dynamic high point of the piece as well as its climax. Possibly, this represents the king's anger and confrontation with the queen. The drama in this interlude (measures 71 to 85) is intense due to the piano melody in octaves and the use of a wide range of notes on the keyboard. One can almost hear in that melody in octaves the strife between the two characters, the king and the queen. The same rhythmic pattern that has been present since the beginning of the piece continues but gradually *diminuendo*s *poco a poco*. This could represent a descent of the queen to her end—perhaps eternal damnation for her sins? However, right before the third verse begins (measures 82-85), Hemsi transitions almost with humor to a broken G major chord played in *staccato*, lightening up the ambience as the third verse begins. Perhaps this is a sly commentary on where his sympathy might lie—with the queen?

Interestingly, the melody remains exactly the same in the third verse, in G-minor, while the piano is in G-major with a few embellishments. This creates a dissonant effect because there are B-flats in the melody while there are B-naturals in the harmony at the same time. In the right hand of the piano accompaniment, a high-moving melody complements the melody in the voice and later descends an octave as the song gradually slows down and dies out. The left hand repeats

the same three notes throughout the entire verse, like a drone. The first note dives deeply to a low note, covering a wide range of over an octave. The rhythmic pattern and relatively complex harmony of the previous two verses are no longer there. The drama of the previous accompaniment parts is replaced by a placid repetition in G-major. Perhaps this strips the art song of its tension and moves it closer to the folk song, emphasizing only text and melody. Or it may reflect the queen's acceptance of her fate. The last phrase is sung without any accompaniment, a cappella for a moment; then the accompaniment comes in very softly at the end again with the same rolled G chord that Hemsi has repeated through the whole third verse in the lowest range of the piano. Perhaps this is the queen's final sigh of acceptance. After the previous dissonance and complexity, the feeling is somewhat hopeful despite the tragedy of the story's ending. Additionally, it should be noted that Hemsi's practice of appending a musical tag to end the song after the singing terminates is a strictly European device and not part of the Sephardic tradition. The same goes for the phrasing and dynamics in the entire opening section. All of these are part of his fusing of the traditional folk song with Western elements.[77]

An analysis of the song "Landarico"—also referred to by Hemsi as *"El Rey por muncha madruga. . ."*—provides a revealing window into what he thought was extremely important in his time and in the places where he was living. On the one hand, he felt his work was indispensable for preserving the melodies that

[77] Katz, *Judeo-Spanish Traditional Ballads*, p. 77.

were no longer sung in their classical traditional folk context. On the other hand, his composing expressed his personal identification with his Sephardic tradition and heritage, as well as the inspiration he gained from Western influences. Hemsi writes, "The notes of the melody alone cannot conjure up the environment, the atmosphere and the climate that created it and maintained it for so many centuries. Thus, after restoring and reconstructing the texts and the melodies from several variants, and convinced of the need to place each melody in its original setting, I have tried to create around each of them the musical atmosphere that could conjure up its own former atmosphere... I have simply tried to recreate with them the traditional spirit of the people in the setting that seemed to me most propitious and adequate of its evocation."[78] Hemsi must have believed that the way to preserve these songs was in this modification and effort to recreate the old meaning through new context so they could be presented before new and wider audiences in an innovative way

[78] Hemsi, *Cancionero Sefardi,* p. 46.

CHAPTER 5: Paul Ben-Haim: The New Israeli Music

Paul Ben-Haim (1897-1984), one of Israel's most prominent and prolific composers since the country's inception, encountered Sephardic music as part of a larger search: an attempt to define the new Israeli music of his generation. The *Yishuv*[79] in the 1920's and 30's saw the immigration of many artists from Central and Eastern European countries, Ben-Haim included, who brought with them a variety of compositional styles. Upon their arrival in the new land, they met with an intensely different landscape of musical colors and shades—Oriental music. As a result, an ideology advocating the use of this exotic and ancient music as a way to form a new *Eretz Israeli* style developed.[80] This created the goal of redefining the identity and style of their composition into a new type of music. Jehoash Hirshberg comments in his biography of Paul Ben-Haim: "Israeli music is viewed not as the result of historical continuity, but a deliberate severing of ties with recent European history and the formation of links with the misty distant past."[81]

This journey to search for and define the new Israeli music motivated Paul Ben-Haim to incorporate not only the techniques and influences that he studied and knew in his country of origin, but to create a fine synthesis of Eastern and Western influences. His compositions constitute a significant contribution

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[79] The term used for the collective body of Jewish residents and settlers in Palestine before the establishment of the State of Israel.
[80] Shiloah & Cohen, "The Dynamics of Change," p. 244.
[81] Jehoash Hirshberg, *Paul Ben-Haim: His Life and Works* (Jerusalem, Israel: Israeli Music Publications Ltd. 1990), p. 365.

toward achieving the crystallization of a uniquely original Israeli music.[82] As part of this endeavor, Ben-Haim developed as a new Israeli composer by selecting and arranging Sephardic songs. He also composed his own music for which he found his inspiration in the idiom of the Judeo-Spanish song. Because he was an "outsider,"[83] Ben-Haim was able to offer an original perspective in his work—a version of fused musical elements that drew on his early musical education in Europe, Oriental elements from the Palestinian scenery, and the fragrance of Sephardic folk culture carried on the wings of a long oral tradition.

Paul Ben-Haim, originally Frankenburger, was the second of five children and was born on July 5, 1897, to parents Heinrich and Anna.[84] His father was an esteemed lawyer in Munich, and the family was privileged and relatively wealthy. Ben-Haim studied piano and composition at the Music Academy in Munich with Kellerman and Beer-Waldbrunn respectively. He learned an extensive Lied repertoire ranging from Schubert to Wolf and familiarized himself with the contemporary repertoire of Mahler and Richard Strauss. His composing personality was formed within the constraints of musical life in Munich, which was relatively traditional and conservative. His earliest compositions, in complex chromatic harmonic style, were mainly written for family occasions. The motivic

[82] Ibid, p. 361.
[83] Not of Sephardic origin.
[84] All the biographical information is taken from Hirshberg's *Paul Ben-Haim: His Life and Works*.

materials conformed to the internal parallelism of the poems.[85] The fact that he and his sister performed every song he wrote at home contributed to his rapid development as a composer: it allowed him to discover the strong and weak points in actual performance situations.[86]

World War One was a harrowing experience in Ben-Haim's life: Not only was he almost killed in a gas attack on the Belgian front, but he lost his brother at the battle of Verdun and then received tidings of the death of his mother at the young age of 51. His deep need for musical creativity brought him right back to composition despite debilitating depression. Upon his return home, he continued to study piano with Friedrich Klose and then with Walter Courvoisier of the school of Ludwig Thuille (1861-1907) at the Munich Music Academy. Thuille's main legacy was his harmony book, which was used widely in German-speaking countries at that time. His attitude toward harmony was linear and did not include instruction in counterpoint, leaving it to his pupils' own studying. He was also strongly opposed to experimental atonal music.[87] Although Ben-Haim was still a young student of composition in his early twenties, his writing showed a remarkable capacity for absorbing a rich variety of styles, a synthesis of everything he learned from late Romantic music to eclectic diatonic harmony.

After the war, Bavaria maintained its political and social autonomy as a federal state within the Weimar Republic. Munich, its capital, continued to be

[85] Ibid. pp. 11-18.
[86] Ibid. p. 20.
[87] Ibid. pp. 24-26.

musically characterized by particularism and conservatism. Nevertheless, Ben-Haim was exposed to a wide array of musical activity by attending the concerts of the great performers of the day. He was appointed deputy director of the chorus and coach (*korrepetitor*) of the Munich Opera House. He held this post for four years and was exposed to many of the great conductors and singers of Europe. In this period, he wrote compositions such as a setting to Psalm 22. The dense contrapuntal writing of this piece shows some influence by Bach combined with Romantic chromatic harmony. In later works, he intentionally chose a simpler musical language, especially in settings of religious music, which he believed should make a direct emotional appeal to the listener in a simple and clear way. For that reason, he rejected traditional major-minor tonality in favor of archaic contrapuntal texture.[88]

Although it seems unlikely that Ben-Haim was directly shaped by Jewish musical sources, it is quite possible that he was moved by a rare visit to Munich's Great Synagogue during the High Holidays. In addition, he may have been influenced by his relationship with Jewish composer Heinrich Shalit (1886-1976).[89] Both composers sought a new and personal mode of expression. They had a preference for archaic simplicity and diatonic harmony rather than the modern dodecaphonic or atonal technique. Shalit commented that Ben-Haim

[88] Ibid. p. 59.
[89] Ibid. p. 45.

"wrote in modern style—but without a trace of the national heritage of our forefathers."[90]

In 1924, Ben-Haim was appointed third *Kapellmeister* and choir conductor of the *Augsburger Stadttheater*. In this capacity, he was principally a conductor, but he evolved as a composer at the same time. In 1927, Ben-Haim composed his most mature and elaborate chamber work from his years in Germany: the Trio for Violin, Viola and Cello (op. 10). This piece is characterized by chromaticism along with the rhetorical pathos of post-Romantic music, yet with elements based on traditional Baroque style.[91] Positive reviews led to public performances of his works: "Frankenburger proved he can preserve beauty, harmony, melody while using extreme-modern experimentation."[92]

While Ben-Haim was enjoying his greatest success as a composer, Bavaria was rapidly deteriorating, both politically and socially. As a result of this political crisis, which began in December of 1930, the Augsburg Opera House terminated his contract and expelled a group of other employees. Ben-Haim had learned to overlook the occasional expression of anti-Semitism. He was raised in a family that belonged to a liberal, anti-Zionist Jewish community in Munich. They strove to cultivate good relations with their Christian compatriots. Therefore, it came as a surprise to Ben-Haim that his post would be terminated at the end of the 1931 season. He preferred to regard his dismissal as an arbitrary

[90] Ibid. pp. 53-54.
[91] Ibid. p. 49.
[92] Ibid. p. 67.

administrative decision due to the economic crisis facing all cultural institutions. Ben-Haim could not find any other conducting position in Germany. When his father wrote a letter to his friend in the Vienna employment office, he was met with the response that "times are tough and there are no positions even for artists who are not Israelites." [93]

The termination of employment at the Augsburg Opera prompted Ben-Haim to take up the gradual process of emigrating to Palestine. In the remaining period in Germany, he faced great financial and personal challenges. His beloved Hely Acham, an Austrian dancer, was obliged by the difficult times to move back in with her parents in Graz. Their forced separation lasted from the summer of 1931 through the summer 1934, when they were finally reunited in Palestine. An additional complication arose: Acham was not Jewish and was ambivalent about conversion. Despite unemployment and a tough financial situation, Ben-Haim continued to be an active writer. He had the unique ability to compose in several stylistic directions simultaneously while giving consideration to the function and inspiration of the text. Reciprocal influences led to a synthesis of different stylistic components without blurring their individual identities. On February 24, 1933, Ben-Haim completed his oratorio *Joram*, only three weeks after Hitler had assumed power in Germany. The character of the piece represented Ben-Haim's decisive separation from the spiritual and cultural world of the times.[94] The work

[93] Ibid. p. 69.
[94] Ibid. p. 89.

was epic and meditative in character. It was unified by clear declamation of text, a melodic vocal style, and exotic Oriental phrasing. It was once again a stylistic synthesis of modern and archaic elements and techniques.[95] Sadly, this monumental work was not performed until 1979.

In March 1933, a Nazi government was installed in Bavaria and immediate steps were taken against Jewish leaders and enterprises. Initially, there was a lack of clarity in the official policy, and Jews believed hard times lay ahead but were convinced they could survive them.[96] Ben-Haim decided to make *Aliyah* to Palestine following a specific remark in the press reprimanding an orchestra's management for performing the work of a Jew.[97] Ben-Haim made his emigration move in an organized and calm fashion. He first visited Palestine to scout out employment opportunities. As an outsider, he was enthusiastic and deeply impressed by the new environment while trying to determine his own place within it. He received invitations to perform through a friendship he made on the ship taking him to Palestine. Since his travel visa did not allow him to work during his stay, his employer suggested he change his name from Frankenburger to Ben-Haim to avoid recognition. He went back to Germany and later officially immigrated to Palestine as part of the Fifth *Aliyah*, which took place between 1932 and 1939 and was comprised of *Olim*[98] mostly from

[95] Ibid. pp. 92-94.
[96] Ibid. p. 99.
[97] Ibid. p. 100.
[98] Hebrew for "immigrants".

Germany, Austria, and Czechoslovakia. Like Ben-Haim, many were well-trained professionals who came from assimilated families that had not been Zionists. *Aliyah* at this time was assessed in terms of quality of the applicant and was not seen as a solution for the persecuted Jewish masses.[99]

Ben-Haim arrived in Palestine on November 19, 1933, and decided to settle in Tel Aviv, which provided great potential as a city bustling with activity. Jerusalem offered a cosmopolitan atmosphere and strong ties with history and tradition, but Tel Aviv was a city of the present and the future. Ben-Haim enjoyed bathing in the sea and eating sweet corn, which occupied an important place in the street life of the city.[100] His first steady job in Palestine was a position as a theory and piano teacher in the *Shulamit* Conservatory (the first music school founded in Palestine). He immediately began to take steps to bring his beloved Hely to join him once she completed her conversion in Europe. He was reluctant to sever all ties with Germany and initially planned to spend two months of the year back in Europe. This plan quickly became unfeasible as the British Mandate laws forbade immigrants to leave the country for the first two years after their arrival. Another year passed before he was reunited with his fiancée in August of 1934. Following the couple's marriage, their son Joram (named after Ben-Haim's oratorio) was born in 1935, and the idea of a long trip slowly faded.

[99] Ibid. p. 97.
[100] Ibid. p. 122.

Due to their lack of any Zionist background, many German immigrants, including Ben-Haim, encountered various obstacles in the process of being absorbed into life in Palestine. The difficulties of absorption drove them to associate themselves once again with the world they had left behind. [101] For Ben-Haim, this situation was less critical than for some since he was mainly focusing on establishing connections and a reputation in the circle of professional musicians in Tel Aviv.[102] However, ignorance of the Hebrew language placed pressure on him when he needed to teach children. On the whole, though, he did not break with the cultural and musical heritage from which his identity as a musician had been formed. The effect of this cultural ambivalence expressed itself on more personal levels such as the changing of his name, which oscillated back and forth between Frankenburger and Ben-Haim for quite a few years after his arrival in Palestine.[103]

At first, Ben-Haim did not have many conducting opportunities. He focused on composition and adopted the style of Debussy and Ravel, of whom he was very fond. The works written in his first years in Palestine display much of these composers' influence. There is a restrained emotional expression, diatonic or bi-tonal harmony, and multiple melodic elements in the same piece. There is also the frequent use of a harmony of empty fifth, seventh, and ninth chords and an avoidance of tonal cadences or leading tones. Ben-Haim's

[101] Ibid. p. 118.
[102] Ibid. p. 120.
[103] Ibid. p. 121.

assimilation into his new homeland is anticipated and artistically documented in his first piano suite, which quotes a local melody he heard on his first visit to Palestine.[104] However, Ben-Haim struggled with the folkloristic idiom. The influences of Bartok and Brahms presented two different social models. In the case of Bartok, the use of folkloristic materials was part of his style and personality. For Brahms, it was a display of an exotic phenomenon. Ben-Haim engaged in synthesizing folk and art song more like the latter and was not always pleased with the result. He displayed a conflict between his inclination towards imitative contrapuntal technique and the urge to distance himself from European harmonic writing, which was not suitable for handling Near Eastern melody. He avoided attempts at artificial combinations of disparate styles and treated the genre as a direct continuation of the intimate lyrical expression of his German Lieder. However, he replaced his chromatic chordal style with monophonic writing and a thin texture.[105]

Many composers anticipated the formation of a new paradigm of Jewish national music and devoted themselves to the artistic reworking of Jewish folk songs. The desire of these Jewish composers was to find the true style of the Jewish melos (melody or song). An article in the newspaper *Ha'aretz* from March 1935 claimed: "We need a musical Bialik, who will shape Hebrew music as our

[104] Ibid. p. 136.
[105] Ibid. p. 155-157.

poet shaped the Hebrew language, literature and poetry."[106] The composer Uriah Boskovitch spearheaded the push for a collective national style, which he dubbed "The Mediterranean Style." Some composers did not go along with this idea. Erich Walter Sternberg, for instance, believed that each composer should go his own way and speak his own language from within himself. He himself avoided using Near Eastern melodies in his music. His style elicited a sharp reaction and his call for freedom of expression and style were not echoed.[107]

Ben-Haim's response to this search was a complex one. He was not a man of words and never wrote ideological explanations of his methods as a composer. He did not want to engage in the stylistic controversies occupying the composers and critics of the 1930's and 40's. Ben-Haim commented on the change he had undergone as a creative artist and expressed the collective experience of the Jewish immigrants in Palestine by use of musical techniques with symbolic extra-musical meanings. At this time, he also lost his father and his two sisters within a short period. His sister Dora died of cancer in 1938; his sister Rosa disappeared during the war after being sent to Theresienstadt. Ben-Haim sought not to dwell on the pathos-laden and tempestuous world of the past. The mood of his works did not express his personal emotions or his sober view of the world around him. It projected a pastoral and optimistic realm of the future, perhaps utopian rather

[106] Ibid. p. 140.
[107] Ibid. pp. 142-143.

than real. His works belonged to the world of the *hora* dance, of workers marching and agricultural songs—the world of the pastoral Orient.

Paul Ben-Haim's most significant transformation as a composer took place through an encounter with the singer Bracha Zephira and the music to which she introduced him. The singer approached Ben-Haim early in 1939 with a request to arrange some of her songs. She had previously performed with her partner Nachum Nardi, a European-born pianist and a composer she had met in Berlin. However, after a few years of performing together, they severed their relationship and Zephira was left without any musical arrangements, since much of the performance with Nardi was improvised and not completely notated.

Zephira was a fascinating individual. She was born to Yemenite parents in Jerusalem but was orphaned from her mother Na'ama Amrani at childbirth and from her father, Joseph Zephira, at the age of three. She then was relocated from one foster family to another. At first, she lived with a Yemenite family, then a Russian family in the Bukharan quarter of the Persian community in Jerusalem. Then she was placed with a Sephardic Jewish family from Salonika, who lived in the neighborhood of *Yemin-Moshe.* The widow of that family brought Zephira to the synagogue at every opportunity during Shabbat, holidays and fast days, and Zephira absorbed the religious music of the Sephardic Jews. Her unintentional acculturation became a part of her work later on.[108]

[108] Ibid. pp. 161-162.

At school age, she was placed in *Shefaya* (a children's village near *Zikhron Ya'akov*) and there she realized her ability to awaken interest and enthusiasm of listeners of European origin by singing the traditional Oriental songs she had picked up earlier. After World War One, she was sent to study at the music school in Jerusalem and soon thereafter, in 1930, she went to study at the Max Reinhardt Theater School in Berlin. There she met Nachum Nardi, who was a native of Russia. They began giving recitals of traditional Jewish ethnic songs; together at first in Europe, where they were very successful, and then back in Palestine. The audience was mostly heterogeneous and was accustomed mainly to European singing. Most people were enthralled with Zephira, but at times she encountered criticism from those not able to appreciate the eastern, or Oriental, flavors she brought to the stage.

After Zephira's relationship with Nardi came to an end, she asked numerous composers such as Marc Lavry, Alexander Boskovitch, Oedeon Partos and Ben-Haim to write arrangements for her music. On a practical level, she was interested in extending her own repertory, but she was also interested in making the general public and the professional musicians of European origin more responsive to Near Eastern culture. Her work helped to transform ethnic traditions in the context of a complex, heterogeneous society. Zephira accelerated the dynamic process of forming a link between the Western-born composers and the Near Eastern heritage. She became an interpreter and intermediary, but she

cannot be judged from a strict ethno-musicological perspective since she changed the music to fit her own preferences.[109]

Ben-Haim transcribed Zephira's singing with great difficulty. The non-tempered intervals, such as the three-quarter tone typical of Arabic music, as well as the uneven rhythms were a challenge. When he or other composers wrote arrangements for these songs, they coped by blurring tonality and using major and minor thirds alternatively. Ben-Haim preferred the Judeo-Spanish materials that Zephira presented to him since their rhythmical and metrical character were closer to European music than the Near Eastern Yemenite songs. His arrangements constituted an individual interpretation of the traditional material and reflected the composer's personality.

Ben-Haim paid close attention to the setting of Sephardic songs and chose different combinations of instruments to fit the accompaniment appropriately.[110] The first two songs he arranged were *Morena, Morenica* and *Lealuca* for voice and harp. He did not want to overburden the folk song with heavy arrangements, so he provided a heterophonic enrichment with the harmony drawn from the pitch material of the melody. The instrumental parts enhance the diatonic line of the song with minorization and rich modulations, especially in the interludes between the stanzas. The texture is thick, with full chordal blocks. He used frequent doubling of fifths, octaves and imitative counterpoint.

[109] Ibid. p. 167.
[110] Ibid. p. 175.

In 1970, Paul Ben-Haim selected six Judeo-Spanish folk songs and arranged them for four voices a capella. The same aesthetic that led him to arrange his previous Sephardic materials is also present in this collection. The voices here successfully fill the role of any instrumental ensemble by providing a rich heterophonic texture. By looking into these arrangements, one can conclude that Ben-Haim is clearly influenced by Bach here, as he was in earlier works. The texture is rich with counterpoint, and the voices move freely and seemingly independently from one another. They all seem to have a horizontal line—a part of their own—and are not just accompanying the folk melody. However, there is a clear vertical thought that transcends. Ben-Haim tried to stay very loyal to the folk melody for the most part and strayed from it only in a few specific places to emphasize a point in the song. The fifth song of that collection is *Tres Hermanicas Eran*. Like most Judeo-Spanish melodies that were passed on orally for generations, this one too exists in several textual versions and has quite a few musical variations that are circulating today in many different styles of music.

This song most likely belongs to the second of the three main categories of the Judeo-Spanish song: the *cancionero*. The song talks of love, disappointment and loss. The first two verses of the text tell a tale of three sisters, of whom two were married off and the third "lost her way." While it tells the story of this third sister, the second line of each verse talks about the white and pink branches with a sigh: "ay." This gives the poem a subtle touch of romantic feeling, as in a pastoral tale. However, as the story progresses, a drama slowly unfolds.

Nevertheless, the phrase describing the blooming branches returns in the same place within every verse. It sounds almost ironic, but can be interpreted as something to give the listener either perspective about life or to lighten up the drama that follows.

There are five clear verses in the song, and in each stanza the first and third phrases repeat. The third verse recounts that her father felt ashamed of his daughter and sent her away to Rhodes. He aims to build a castle, perhaps to hide her; that, however, is not clear from the poem. The last verse, at least in this version of the song, seems disconnected contextually. It speaks of a man who "came to know it" and drowned himself in the sea. It is not clear what "it" is—maybe the castle, the sister or the situation. The song ends in this way in most of the extant versions, although some versions have one more verse before the last one that does not exist in the Ben-Haim version. It is not clear who the man is who drowns himself at sea, perhaps a lover the woman had.

Musically, the structure of the folk melody has two hemistiches. There are 16 syllables in the first hemistich and 13 in the second one. The second hemistich repeats twice to create an ABB form. The B part of the melody descends in small steps as is typical of the Sephardic song genre. The song has some movement to it; it is principally in three-quarter time, but like most Judeo-Spanish folk melodies, it does not follow the exact pattern of Western music and the third measure in the beginning of each verse has one measure of 2/4, then goes right back to 3/4. Some versions ignore that change and lengthen the irregular

measure, but Ben-Haim probably tried to stay true to the notation he made from the source.

Unlike the other songs in this collection, this one begins purely as the folk version. The soprano part maintains the folk melody as it was sung in the oral tradition, in a clean and simple way (measures 1-13). The melody sounds like it is mostly in D major, with a slight modal touch of a lowered seventh in the B part of the melody (measure 12, 20); in those measures where the melody comes to C natural rather C-sharp, it sounds mixolydian for a moment.

The alto voice then enters right before the soprano repeats the B section. On the first note, the two voices are in unison and then they split to a third, creating the first notion of polyphony. The sound remains in consonance and still has a clean and pure resonance to it. The alto echoes the tune simply with a melody that resembles the folk melody but intertwines with the soprano part in thirds and sixths. The alto's text is not sung at the same time as the soprano's, which is also what creates the feeling of an echo. The voices progress in opposite directions in measures 15-16 to give this a "classical" sound of voices moving in contrary motion. The pattern of the two voices is similar rhythmically as well as melodically in terms of the intervals. This gives the general feeling of a madrigal. This first appearance of an interval other than a third or sixth is at the cadence of the first verse, where the soprano and alto sing a fifth, rendering the tonality at this point rather ambiguous.

The women's voices continue to intertwine with each other beautifully until the tenor enters in measure 36. This is the first time we encounter a full chord in the song. The tenor echoes the phrase that says "Two of them were married" as the top two voices sing the word "lost," referring to the third sister. Ben-Haim chooses to sound the harmony of a B minor in this place. It adds a touch of sadness but he does not linger; the tenor melody flits on and off of the note B alternating with a C. The second time the B phrase repeats, the alto sings a D-sharp rather than D-natural, and the B minor is changed to B major. In this way, Ben-Haim blurs the feeling of tonality between major and minor. This is a technique he uses often in many of the Near Eastern melodies he has composed and arranged.[111] The soprano and alto now move together mostly in thirds with an occasional empty fifth. The tenor echoes their voices in polyphonic counterpoint. As the third verse comes to a close, the harmony seems to be straightforward B major, but since the alto and tenor continue to move melodically in measure 35, the presence of both a C-sharp and C natural creates an interesting dissonance.

Up to this point, one could easily observe the intricate horizontal lines moving while uttering the text at slightly different times. However, in the beginning of the third verse, all three voices are now almost exclusively singing the text together in homophony, creating a stronger vertical feeling and sounding like a chorale for a moment. Ben-Haim uses the same mechanism to introduce

[111] Ibid. p. 169.

the next voice because all three voices are singing together as the bass is about to enter as the echo. As in previous verses, each new voice enters with a similar rhythmic pattern and as an echo while the voices already singing are declaiming the text together. This time, however, there is a complexity in the harmony that adds some more tension to the plot of the story. In measures 57-60, the three top voices declare that the father is in shame, while the bass enters with a line stating that the daughter was sent to Rhodes. Harmonically, the pickup chord to measure 58 is E major, which moves to an A minor chord that resolves to D major. As the three voices are about to repeat the B part, the bass echoes their line in measure 60. The harmony in that place goes from D major (measure 59) to C major in first inversion, then B major in second inversion, creating a gradual ascension—a lovely moment of word painting representing the father sending his daughter away.

An extraordinary departure takes place on the pickup note to measure 70. We expect the verse to begin simply with the soprano voice singing the folk melody as it has done so far; instead, the tempo changes to *piu mosso,* the dynamics are *subito forte*, the key changes to G major, and all three voices other than the bass sing the second line speaking of the white and pink branches in bloom. Their melody sounds almost like bells gently jingling atop a tree limb. Now, surprisingly, the bass gets to sing the folk melody while all the other voices repeat the same textual phrase over and over, perhaps representing the stately castle emerging on the horizon. In measure 77, the folk tune returns to the

soprano while all the other voices are singing the text together. At this point, the intricacy of the counterpoint makes it difficult to know who is following whom. All the voices join together for this verse, cadencing again in B major (measures 85-6).

The fifth and last verse changes the nature of the song completely. Here we have the final lament for the man who has thrown himself into the sea. The tempo changes to *piu lento* and the dynamics now ask for a *pianissimo*. The soprano sings the melody—but there is no counterpoint and the harmony has been simplified once again to be almost as bare as in the beginning of the song. The other voices are not singing any text but just an "ah…" and only function as accompaniment to the soprano. The song continues to slow down, and the layering of the voices and the counterpoint comes back as the very last phrase of the text exclaims that he has drowned himself in the sea. The harmony remains in a modal D, since all the voices are singing the C-natural once again. The very end lingers on the tonic but fades into almost nothing in terms of the dynamics, giving the song a very somber ending—the full drama and mystery that are in the text.

This song is an example that shows the journey that Paul Ben-Haim went through on his search for the new Mediterranean composition and his own voice within that style. His earliest works were considered Romantic with high chromaticism. Then he grew as a composer and showed rich counterpoint in his writing as he was influenced by Bach. At the time of his immigration to Palestine,

it was the French impressionists who left their mark on him and he wrote in the style of Debussy and Ravel. Finally, he was exposed to different flavors of Near-Eastern music, among them the Judeo-Spanish song. The fact that these arrangements were written later in his life may mean that he was touched and inspired by the Judeo-Spanish songs not just through his encounter with Bracha Zephira and the writing of arrangements for her to sing earlier on, but also in terms of how he viewed himself as a composer. The context of writing for a four-part choir is not at all in the traditional folk idiom of the Judeo-Spanish song, but very much a western form of expression. Ben-Haim realized the rich potential of these musical themes and continued to reinvent himself within them. On the whole, the material penetrated his compositional journey and inspired his later and larger works.[112]

The immigrants who came to Palestine had to reconcile their national identification with, an emotional attachment to the countries they came from. There was a need to integrate and assimilate the various ethnic groups. As Paul Ben-Haim confronted this fascinating new reality and its challenges, his compositional style grew. He set out to find a new musical identity for himself—and for a whole generation of a "new Israeli" society.[113] In part, he created this identity by synthesizing the folk song of Sephardic Jews with Western art song.

[112] Ibid. p. 176
[113] Shiloah & Cohen, "The Dynamics of Change," p. 234.

CHAPTER 6: Conclusion

Alberto Hemsi and Paul Ben-Haim could both be credited with being preservers and champions of the Sephardic song. Though they had completely different journeys through life and different motivations for their musical expression, they both arranged Sephardic song using a synthesis of Western influences. They both found the traditional Judeo-Spanish folk song important and interesting material to preserve, transmit and incorporate into their compositional style.

These two composers can be seen as a paradigm for a phenomenon that occurred throughout the world, especially following the wave of Westernization and modernization during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In fact, an understanding of the traditional folk song's history teaches us that the folk song, at its core, must evolve and change in order to survive. Hirshberg comments that traditions are never static, and that a mixed environment cannot help but generate mixed musical styles.[114]

Hemsi, as a musician of Sephardic descent, was moved from the foundation of his being to preserve the music of his people. As times were changing, less people of his generation knew the old traditions, spoke Judeo-Spanish or sang the songs he heard from his grandmother in his childhood. He believed the treasure of the Sephardic song would become extinct unless something was done to change its old purpose. The role the Sephardic song

[114] Hirshberg, *Paul Ben-Haim*, p. 167.

played in people's lives was becoming increasingly irrelevant. Hemsi saw the synthesis with Western music as a powerful way to incorporate modernization and Westernization to the folk song, and bring this music to larger audiences. By composing arrangements of this music, he hoped to inspire and re-create the temperament of the original feeling.

Paul Ben-Haim was not of Sephardic descent but, even in hs early career, he excelled in synthesizing different influences and incorporating diverse styles into his composition. Therefore, it is no wonder that, upon his arrival to Palestine, he was moved by the new environment and his composition style and musical expression would change and grow tremendously. The Judeo-Spanish song was only a small part of his musical interests, as he was fascinated with all mediterranean Jewish music. However, not only was he inspired to compose arrangements that synthesized the Judeo-Spanish folk song with his own complex and unique musical style, but he also showed that this folk musical style influenced his musical identity. This style would be incorporated into his later compositions, becoming a part of who he was as a composer.

Even though this thesis examines a particular synthesis of the Sephardic song with Western music (specifically, art song), which happened in a period of cultural modernization and Westernization, one may continue to find examples of these phenomena continuously. As the world continues to become smaller, as technology increasingly gives us more access to other cultures and people are more interconnected, more and more artists engage with folk traditions that they

incorporate into their own styles. Specifically, the Judeo-Spanish song interests many different composers of all backgrounds, Sephardic or not, Jewish or not and different streams of music.

The year 1992 marked 500 years to the Spanish Expulsion, and awakened a revival of interest in this fascinating heritage around the world in both scholarship and music. Many modern composers incoporate elements of the Sephardic song into their styles. This Sephardic character gives them a sense of antiquity or an exoticism that is an attractive form of musical expression. The synthesis between the traditional song and modern elements has contributed to its preservation as well as given expression to a new art form.

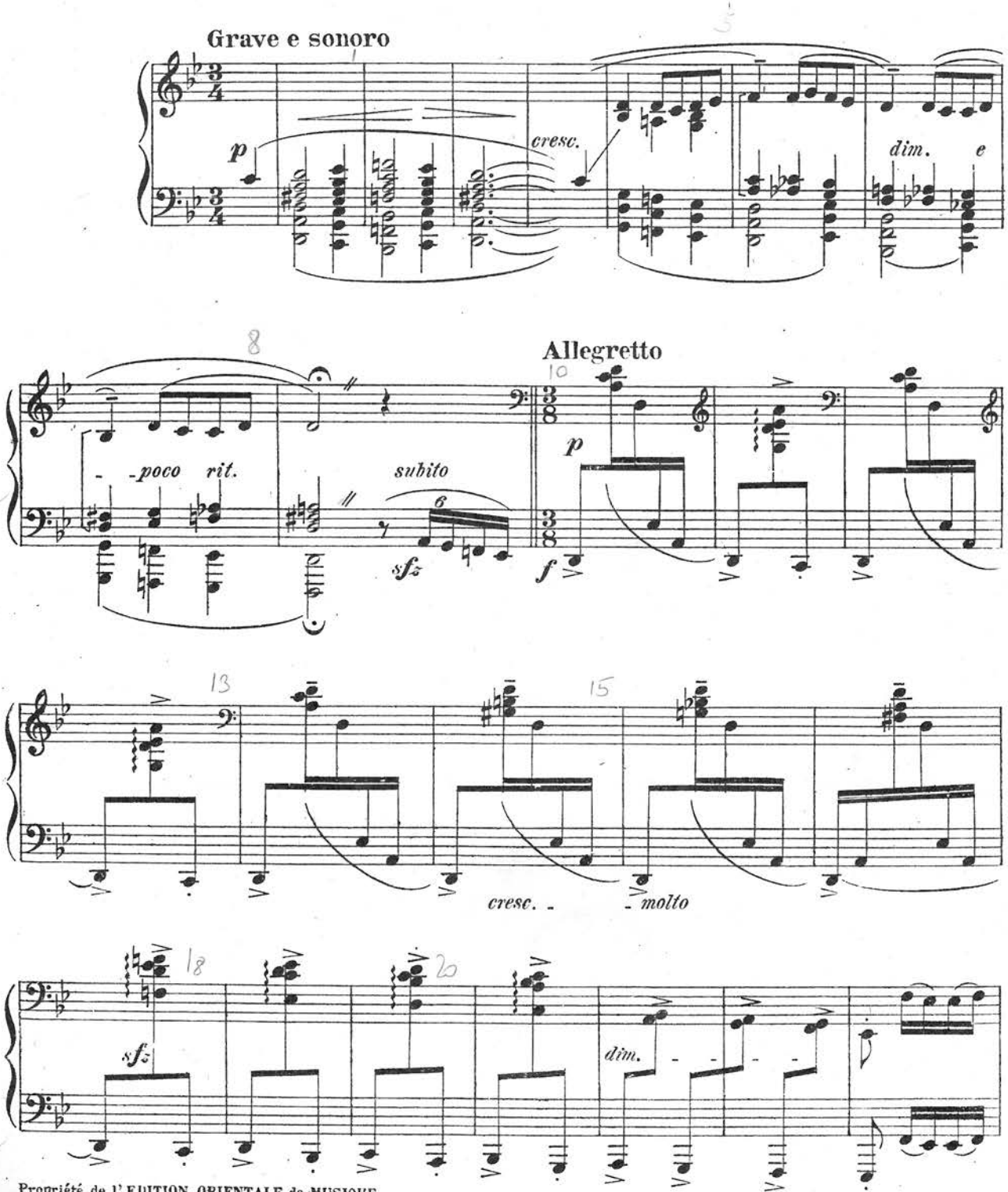
The Sephardim now rarely live in the closed communities as they did during the Ottoman Empire. Many Sephardim reside amongst other peoples and intermarry with other Jews. Many of them do not know the Judeo-Spanish or Judeo-Arabic language of their ancestors. However, many Sephardim still have a desire, despite their lack of connection to their religious or cultural customs, to celebrate this heritage or express the Sephardic culture of their ancestors. Through the Sephardic song, even in a synthesized version, they can find a tangible vehicle to hang on to the memory of their ancestors while the style of music will feel relevant, touching. Music reflects a story and memory and provides a vessel of expression for those who want to share or become a part of a culture.

Our identity is defined by our uniqueness as individuals, as well as our affiliation with a group whose history, language, beliefs and aesthetic sense we share. It is interesting to think of how the Sephardic song will be a part of the artistic expression of the next generation of Sephardim. Will it help shape their Sephardic identity? Will it continue to provide exotic or fascinating expression for artists who are not part of this culture? Given the advancement of technology, what sort of musical fusions or new art forms will the future bring?

APPENDICES: A

El rey por muncha madruga.....

A. Hemsi Op. 8-2



A. H. 34

legato

25

p

El rey por mun - cha ma - dru -

8

f martellati

f

pp

m. s.

leggero

30

ga El rey por mun - cha ma - dru - ga On -

m. d.

35

de la rei - - - na i - va On - de la

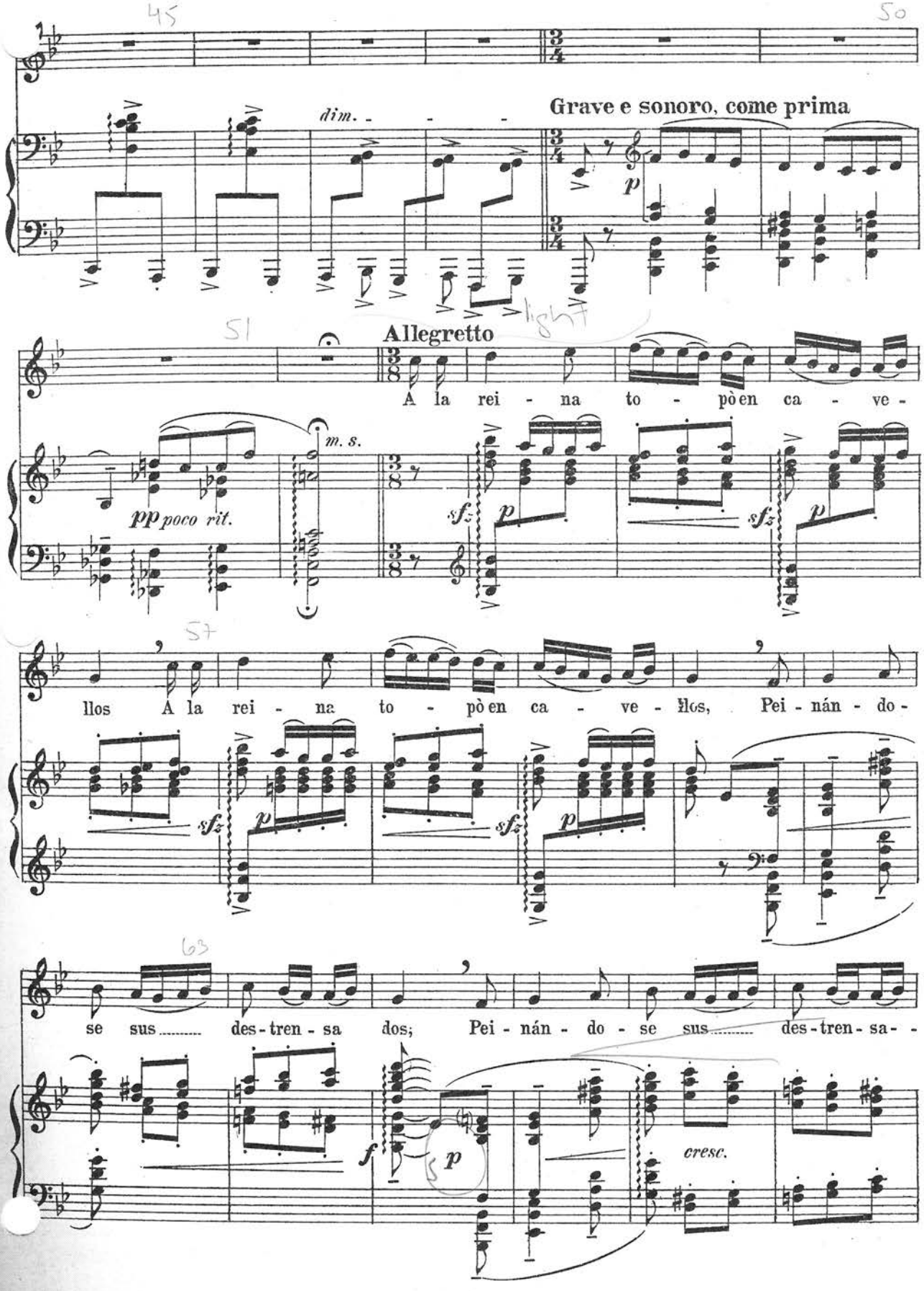
poco cresc.

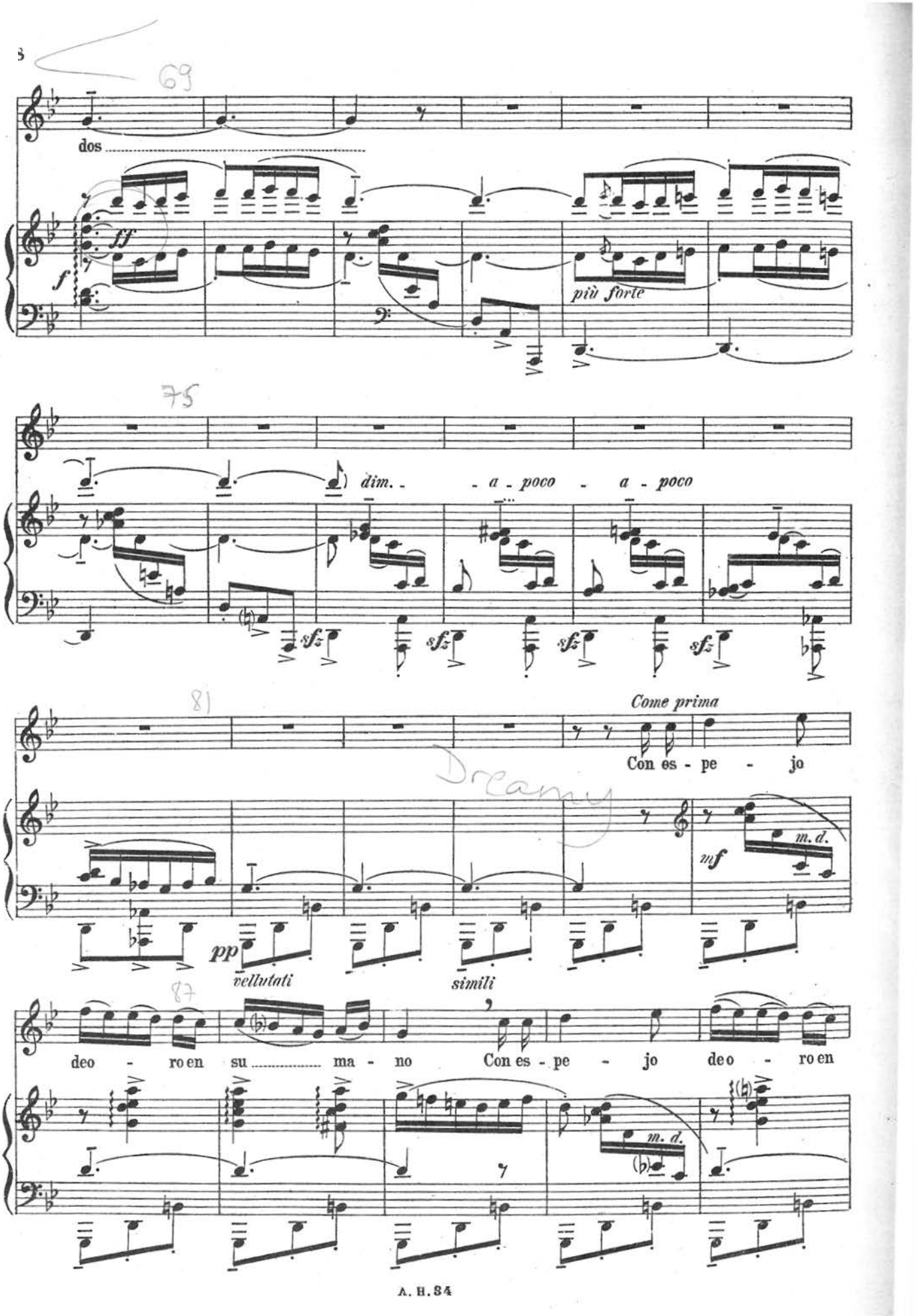
40

rei - - - na i - va

sfz

f


45
50
dim.
Grave e sonoro, come prima
p
51
Allegretto
A la rei - na to - pò en ca - ve -
m. s.
pp poco rit.
sf
p
sf
p
57
llos A la rei - na to - pò en ca - ve - llos, Pei - nán - do -
sf
p
sf
p
cresc.
63
se sus..... des - tren - sa dos; Pei - nán - do - se sus..... des - tren - sa - -
f
p
cresc.


69
dos
ff
f
più forte
75
dim. - a - poco - a - poco
sfz
81
Come prima
Con es - pe - jo
Dreamy
m. d.
mf
pp
vellutati
simili
87
deo - ro en su ma - no Con es - pe - jo deo - ro en
m. d.
A. H. 84

92

su ma - no Mi - rán - do - se su bel ga - la -

97

no. Mi - rán - do - se su bel ga - la - no

103

poco rall. *e dim.*

108

pp come unreco (1) *riten. assai*

su bel ga - la - no

p *col canto* *pp* *pp*

(1) *Anadido por el autor*
Aggiunto dall'autore
Ajouté par l'auteur

A. H. 34

B: Tres Hermanicas Eran

TRES HERMANICAS ERAN

Tres hermanicas eran ,
Blancas de roz, Ay, ramas de flor !...
Tres hermanicas eran,
Tres hermanicas son .

Las dos eran cazadas ,
Blancas de roz, Ay, ramas de flor ! ...
Las dos eran cazadas ,
La una se deperdio .

Su padre con vergüensa ,
Blancas de roz, Ay, ramas de flor ! ...
Su padre con vergüensa ,
A Rodes l'ambió .

En medio del camino ,
Blancas de roz, Ay, ramas de flor ! ...
En medio del camino ,
Castillo le fragué.

Varón es que lo supo ,
Blancas de roz, Ay, ramas de flor ! ...
Varón es que lo supo ,
A la mar ya se echó .

TROIS PETITES SOEURS

Elles étaient trois petites soeurs ,
Blanches et roses , Ay, rameaux en fleur ! ...
Elles étaient trois petites soeurs ,
Trois petites soeurs elles sont .

Les deux étaient mariées ,
Blanches et roses , Ay, rameaux en fleur ! ...
Les deux étaient mariées ,
L'une se perdit .

Son père , de honte ,
Blanches et roses , Ay, rameaux en fleur ! ...
Son père , de honte ,
À Rhodes l'expédia .

Au milieu du chemin ,
Blanches et roses , Ay, rameaux en fleur ! ...
Au milieu du chemin ,
Un castel lui construisit .

Un homme vint à le savoir ,
Blanches et roses , Ay, rameaux en fleur ! ...
Un homme vint à le savoir ,
À la mer il se jeta .

THREE LITTLE SISTERS

They were three little sisters ,
White and pink, ah, branches in bloom !...
They were three little sisters ,
Three little sisters they are .

Two of them were married ,
White and pink, ah, branches in bloom !...
Two of them were married ,
One has lost herself .

The father , in shame ,
White and pink, ah, branches in bloom !...
The father , in shame ,
Sent her to Rhodes .

In the middle of the way ,
White and piank, ah, branches in bloom !...
In the middle of the way
A castle arose .

A man came to know it ,
White and pink , ah, branches in bloom !...
A man came to know it ,
Drowned himself in the sea .

DREI KLEINE SCHWESTERN

Sie waren drei kleine Schwestern ,
Weiss und rosig, o, blühende Zweige ! ...
Sie waren drei kleine Schwestern ,
Drei kleine Schwestern sie sind .

Zwei geheiratet haben ,
Weiss und rosig, o , blühende Zweige ! ...
Zwei geheiratet haben ,
Eine ist gefallen .

Der Vater , voller Scham ,
Weiss und rosig , o , blühende Zweige ! ...
Der Vater , voller Scham
Nach Rhodos sie sandte .

Auf der Mitte des Weges ,
Weiss und rosig , o , blühende Zweige ! ...
Auf der Mitte des Weges
Eine Burg ward gebaut .

Ein Mann kam's zu wissen ,
Weiss und rosig , o , blühende Zweige !...
Ein Mann kam's zu wissen ,
Er warf sich in's Meer .

שלוש אחיות קטנות

היו שלש אחיות קטנות
לבנות ואדמומיות, אה, ענפים פורחים
היו שלש אחיות קטנות
שלש אחיות הן.

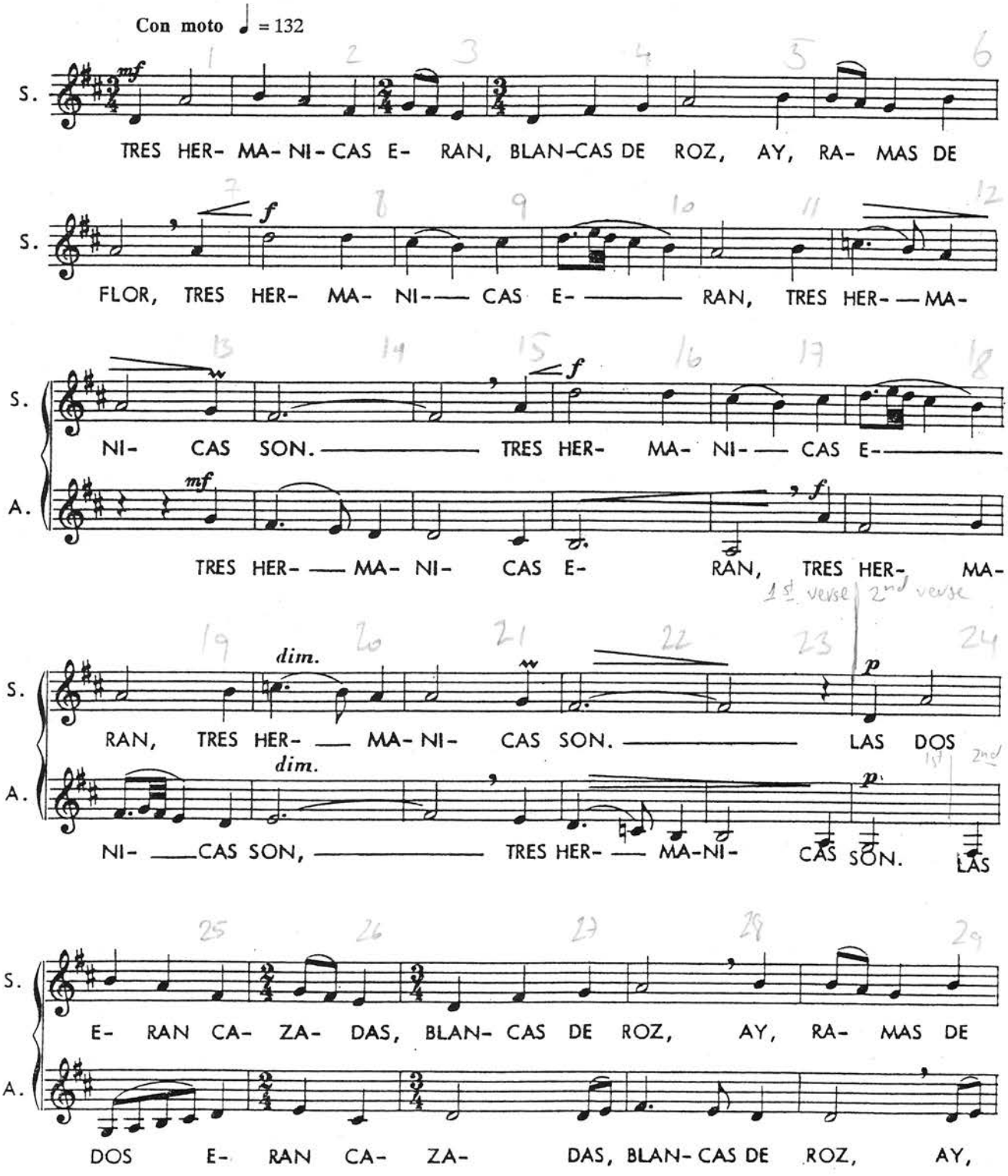
שתים התחתנו
לבנות ואדמומיות, אה, ענפים פורחים
שתים התחתנו
אחת אבדה דרכה.

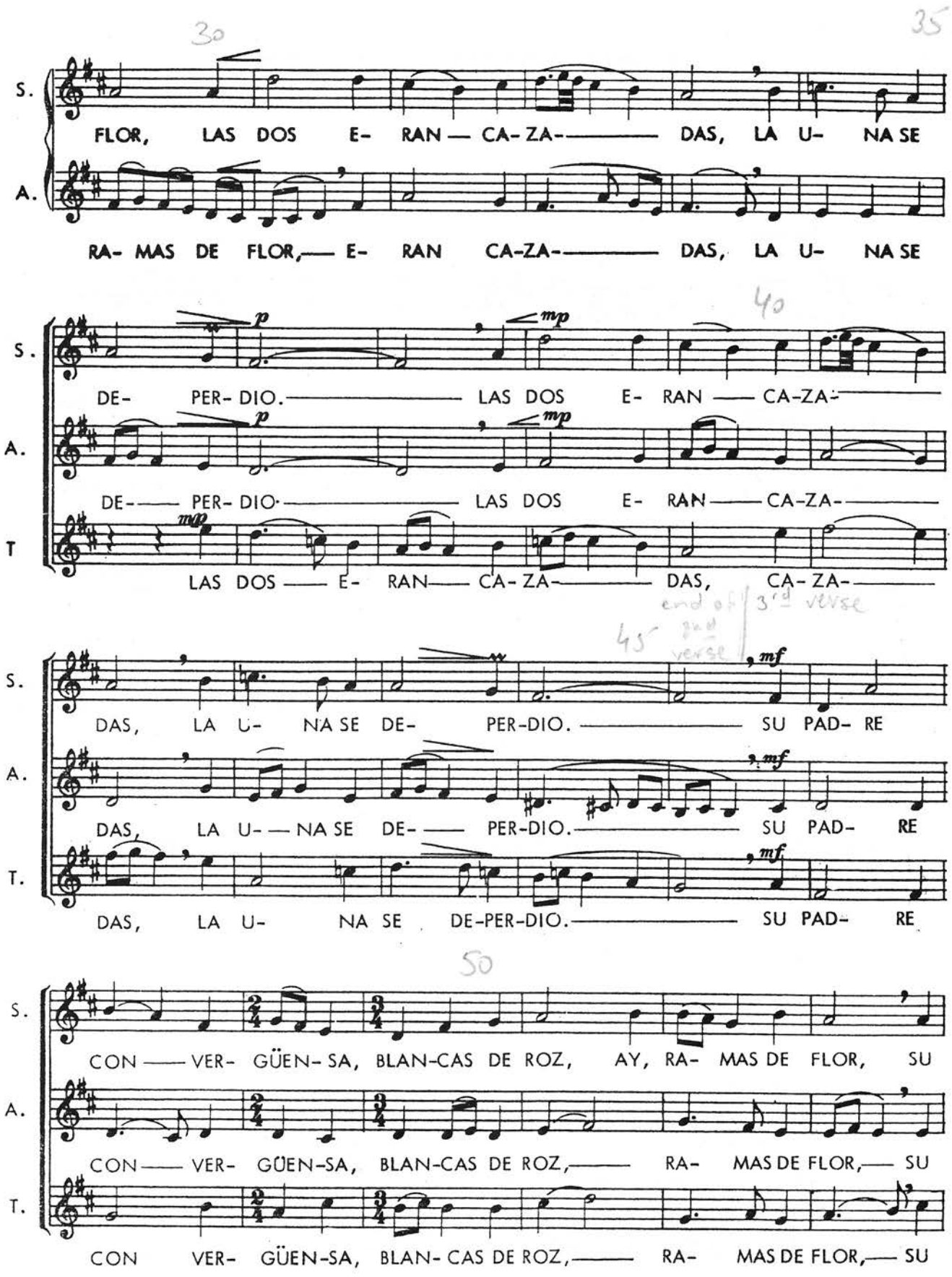
האב התביייש
לבנות ואדמומיות, אה, ענפים פורחים
האב התביייש
לרודוס שלח אותה.

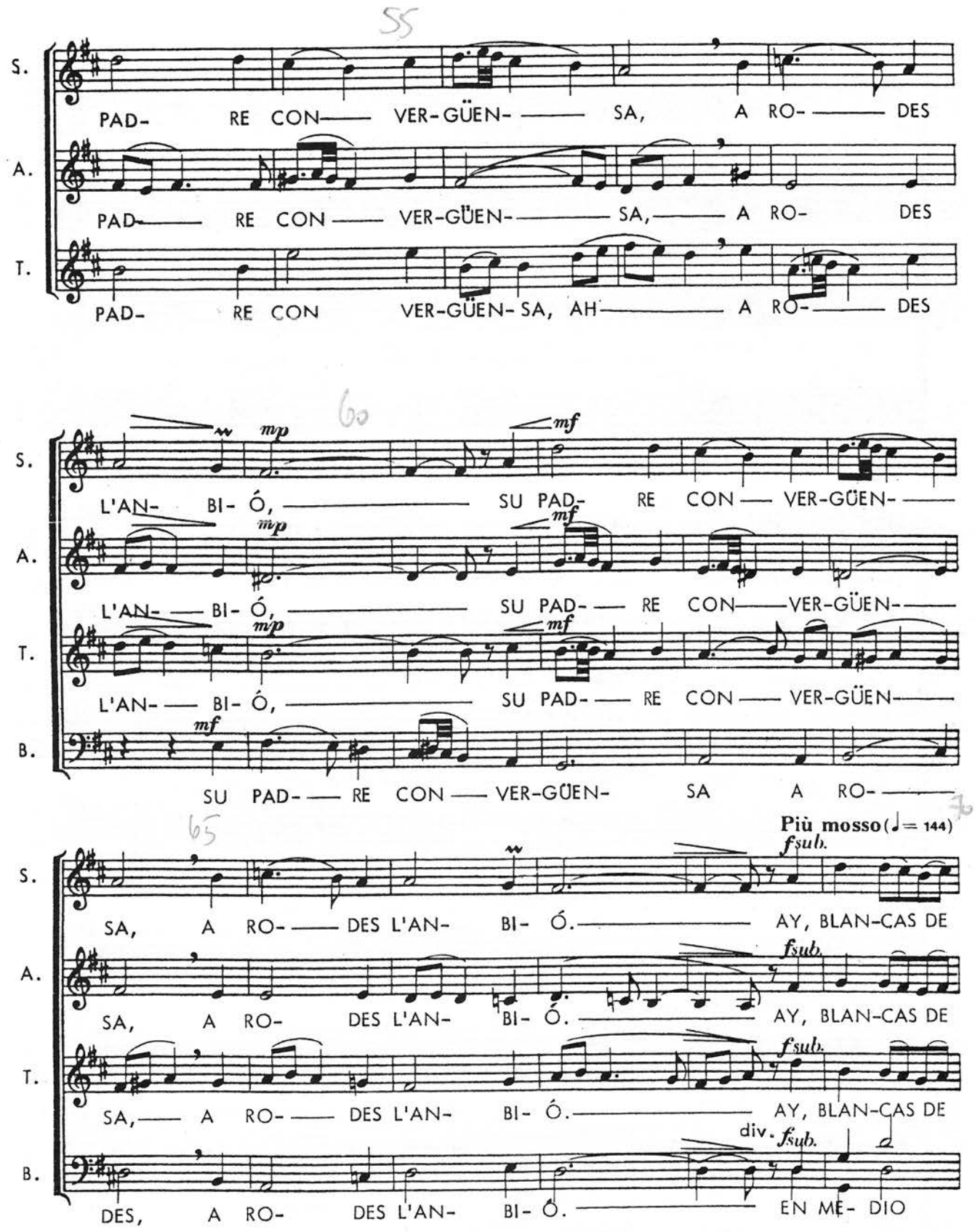
באמצע הדרך
לבנות ואדמומיות, אה, ענפים פורחים
באמצע הדרך –
הוקם ארמון.

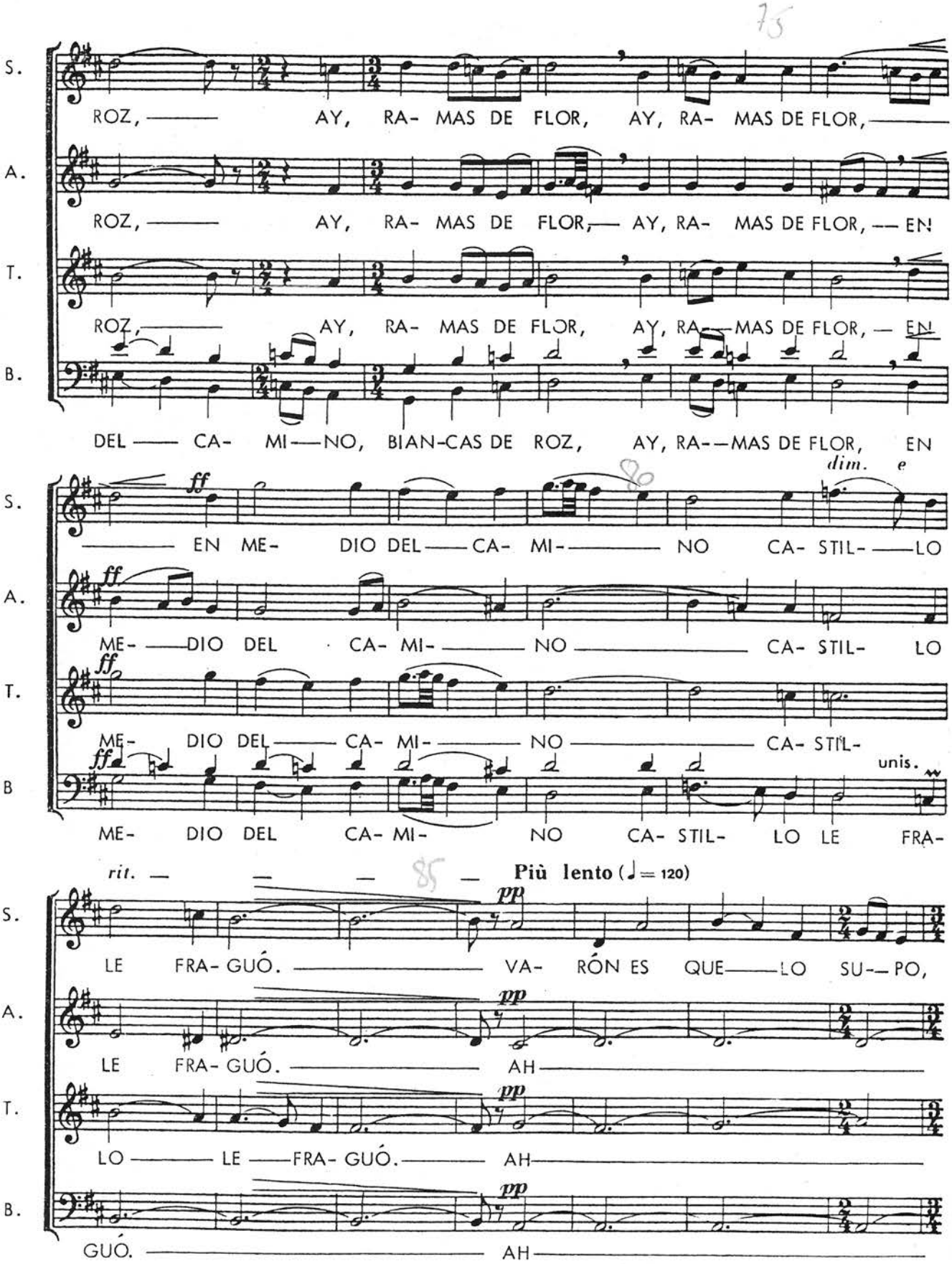
איש בא לדעת
לבנות ואדמומיות, אה, ענפים פורחים
איש בא לדעת
הטביע עצמו בים.

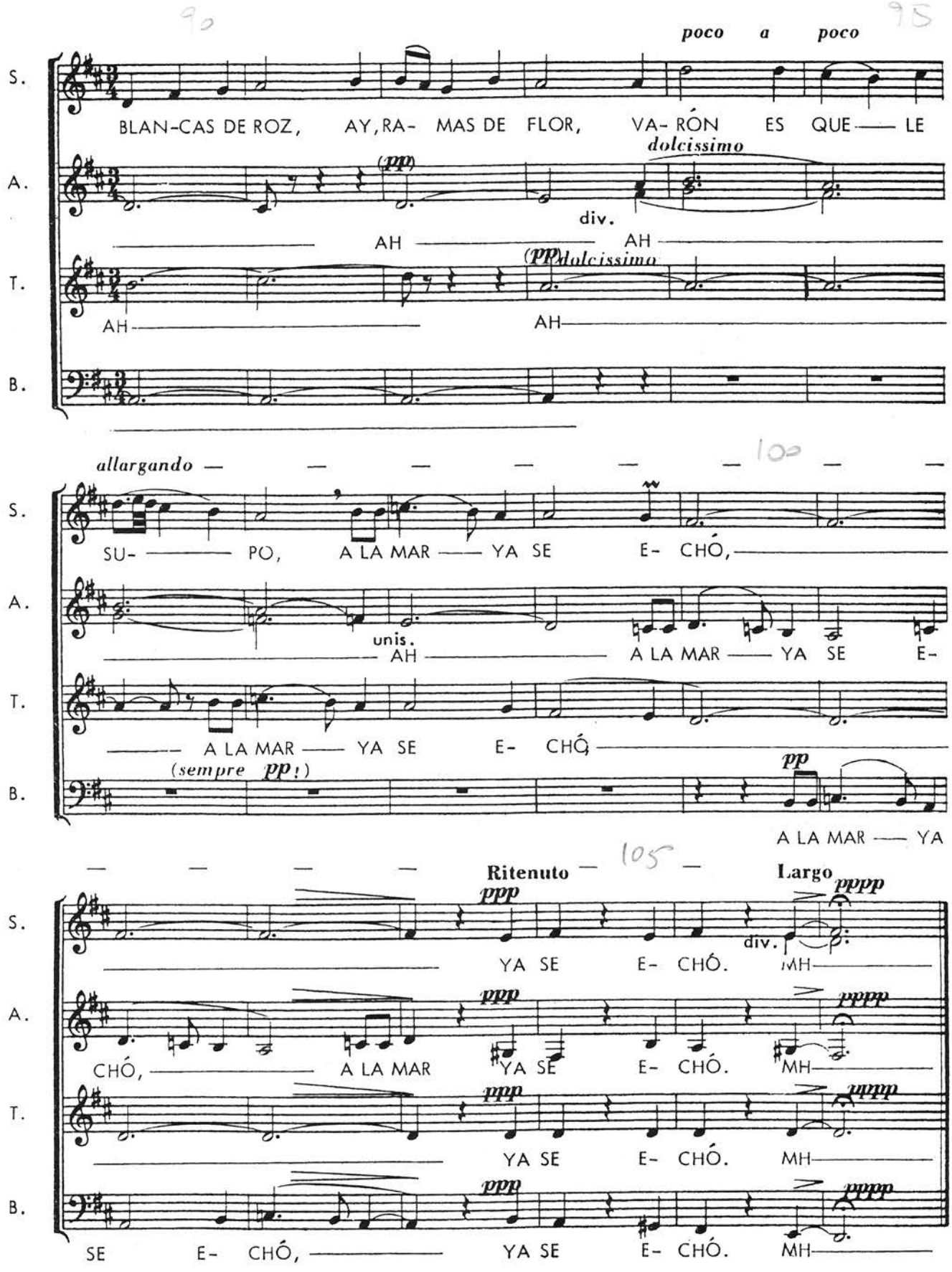
TRES HERMANICAS ERAN V שלש אחיות קטנות




30
35
S.
FLOR, LAS DOS E- RAN — CA- ZA- ——— DAS, LA U- NA SE
A.
RA- MAS DE FLOR,— E- RAN CA-ZA- ——— DAS, LA U- NA SE
40
p
mp
S.
DE- PER- DIO. ——— LAS DOS E- RAN — CA-ZA-
A.
DE- — PER- DIO ——— LAS DOS E- RAN — CA-ZA- ———
T
mp
LAS DOS — E- RAN— CA- ZA- ——— DAS, CA- ZA- ———
end of 3rd verse
45
2nd verse
mf
S.
DAS, LA U- NA SE DE- PER-DIO. ——— SU PAD- RE
A.
DAS, LA U- — NA SE DE- — PER-DIO. ——— SU PAD- RE
T.
DAS, LA U- NA SE DE-PER-DIO. ——— SU PAD- RE
50
S.
CON — VER- GÜEN- SA, BLAN-CAS DE ROZ, AY, RA- MAS DE FLOR, SU
A.
CON — VER- GÜEN-SA, BLAN-CAS DE ROZ,— RA- MAS DE FLOR,— SU
T.
CON VER- GÜEN-SA, BLAN- CAS DE ROZ,— RA- MAS DE FLOR,— SU


55
S.
A.
T.
PAD- RE CON VER-GÜEN- SA, A RO- DES
PAD- RE CON VER-GÜEN- SA, A RO- DES
PAD- RE CON VER-GÜEN- SA, AH A RO- DES
60
mp
mf
L'AN- BI- Ó, SU PAD- RE CON VER-GÜEN-
L'AN- BI- Ó, SU PAD- RE CON VER-GÜEN-
L'AN- BI- Ó, SU PAD- RE CON VER-GÜEN-
B.
SU PAD- RE CON VER-GÜEN- SA A RO-
65
70
Più mosso (♩= 144)
fsub.
SA, A RO- DES L'AN- BI- Ó. AY, BLAN-CAS DE
SA, A RO- DES L'AN- BI- Ó. AY, BLAN-CAS DE
SA, A RO- DES L'AN- BI- Ó. AY, BLAN-CAS DE
div.
DES, A RO- DES L'AN- BI- Ó. EN ME- DIO


75
S.
ROZ, —— AY, RA- MAS DE FLOR, AY, RA- MAS DE FLOR, ——
A.
ROZ, —— AY, RA- MAS DE FLOR, — AY, RA- MAS DE FLOR, — EN
T.
ROZ, —— AY, RA- MAS DE FLOR, AY, RA- MAS DE FLOR, — EN
B.
DEL —— CA- MI — NO, BIAN-CAS DE ROZ, AY, RA- — MAS DE FLOR, EN
80
ff
dim. e
S.
—— EN ME- DIO DEL — CA- MI- —— NO CA- STIL- — LO
A.
ME- — DIO DEL CA- MI- —— NO —— CA- STIL- LO
T.
ME- DIO DEL —— CA- MI- —— NO —— CA- STIL-
B
unis.
ME- DIO DEL CA- MI- NO CA- STIL- LO LE FRA-
rit. — — — 85 — Più lento (♩= 120)
pp
S.
LE FRA- GUÓ. —— VA- RÓN ES QUE — LO SU- — PO,
A.
LE FRA- GUÓ. —— AH ——
T.
LO —— LE — FRA- GUÓ. —— AH ——
B.
GUÓ. —— AH ——


90
95
poco a poco
S.
BLAN-CAS DE ROZ, AY, RA- MAS DE FLOR, VA- RÓN ES QUE — LE
A.
(pp)
dolcissimo
div.
AH — AH
T.
(pp)
dolcissimo
AH — AH
B.
allargando
100
S.
SU- — PO, A LA MAR — YA SE E- CHÓ,
A.
unis.
AH — A LA MAR — YA SE E-
T.
— A LA MAR — YA SE E- CHÓ
(sempre pp!)
B.
pp
A LA MAR — YA
105
Ritenuto
Largo
S.
ppp
pppp
div.
YA SE E- CHÓ. MH
A.
CHÓ, — A LA MAR YA SE E- CHÓ. MH
T.
YA SE E- CHÓ. MH
B.
SE E- CHÓ, — YA SE E- CHÓ. MH

ca 3'30"

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